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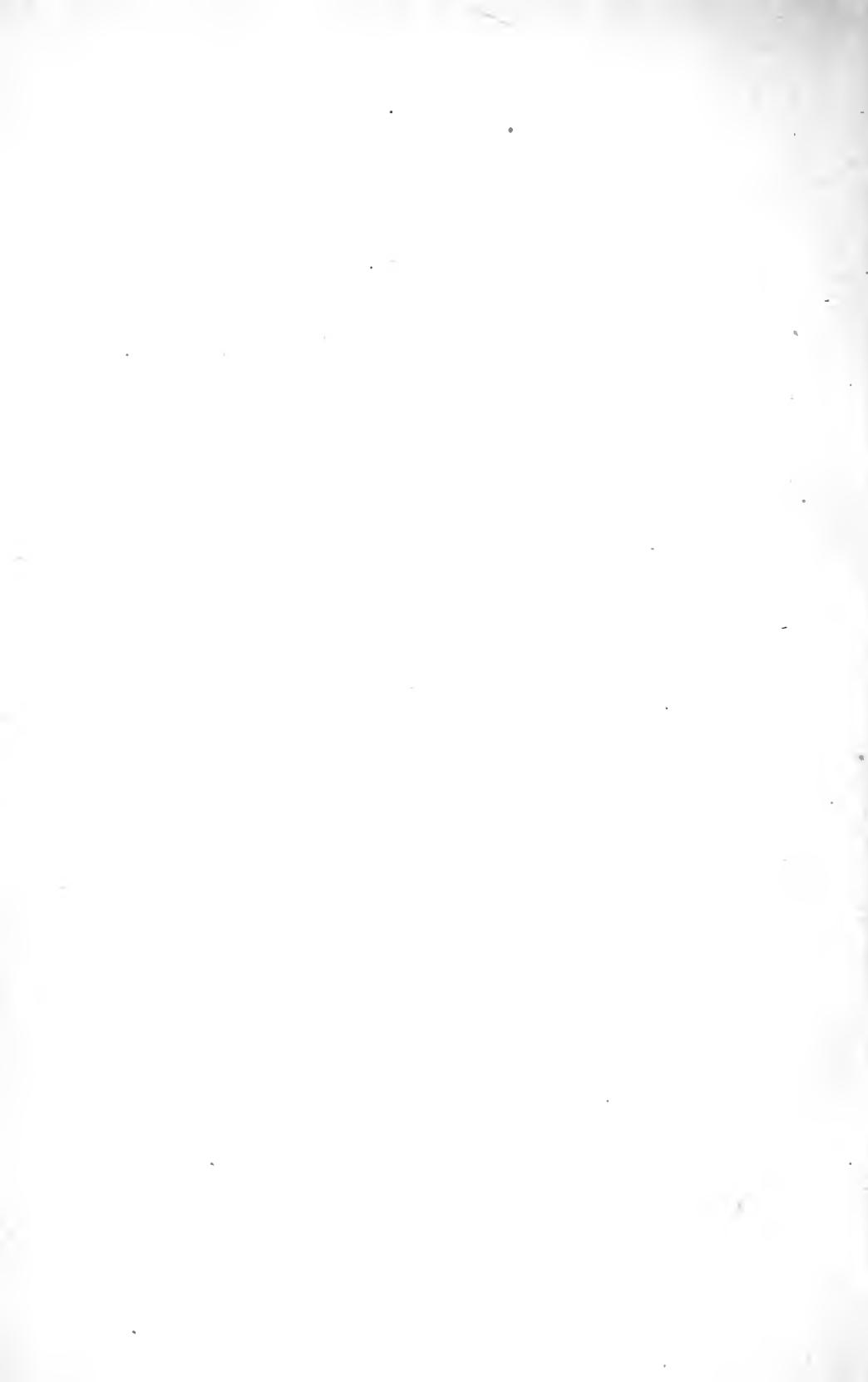
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MAUDE MAYNARD

VOL. II.



# MAUDE MAYNARD

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'ALMOST FAULTLESS' 'A BOOK FOR GOVERNESSES'

*IN THREE VOLUMES*

VOL. II.

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## MAUDE MAYNARD.

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### CHAPTER XVI.

Thursday, Christmas-eve, December 24.

To-morrow will be Charlotte's wedding-day !  
To-night is Christmas-eve, and—

‘Thoughts come and go as they will to-night,  
As I sit by my fire alone.’

It is pleasant to sit here. It is pleasant to close my eyes after the incessant bustle of to-day, and think quietly all alone.

‘Peace on earth and good will towards man.’ How long ago the angels sang it, and yet I fancy that I hear them now ! What is it ? Only the chiming of the village bells ! Soft, sweet, and low it comes through the distance ; ‘peace, peace,’ it breathes. It

enters my heart ; it fills my soul ; it warms my blood ; it nerves every sentient power of my frame !

‘Ring out the old, ring in the new,  
Ring happy bells across the snow !’

It must be so. I am not dreaming. I am wide awake. I love him, I am not afraid to own it. I love him. ‘Ring out wild bells !’ Every tone has an echo in my heart, and I give myself up to the sweet influence. Why not ? Only for one little hour—for the first time and the last. He once said to me that he should like the happiest associations of his life to linger about Christmas. They shall linger about my Christmas for ever and ever !

Happy Christmas-eve ! Do not go so fast ! A little longer let the sweet present stay ! A little longer let me forget all but the ‘now’ of existence ! This ‘pleasure stretched almost to pain !’

I love him ? Am I cursed or blessed ? My heart goes out to him ; my soul clings to

him ; my faith rests upon him ; my whole being turns to him ! My love, my love !

Since the night I asked him to stay over Charlotte's wedding, I have never seen him. My secret is safe. He knew I was in trouble that day. That was what made him talk in the way he did—thinking that what he said might help me. It did. I have been different ever since. And when I said what I did, he understood it. He knew it was just the longing for someone who had been kind to me to be there on that day, which would be a trying one to me ; I dislike strangers and a large party so much. And it is perfectly natural that I should never have gone to the schools lately. All our regular habits have been broken up ; the house has been full of company, and there have been incessant arrivals and amusements, and arrangements going on. Even Gypsie's lessons are discontinued. So my secret is my own, my own !

Ring out wild bells ! Ring out blessings to my love ! Forgetfulness of the past and

hope for the future ! Gladden him with visions ; make——what is that ?——it is the singers !

They are under my window ! Their carol is loud and clear, and it is Christmas morning !

The singers are gone now. It is Christmas-day, and Charlotte's wedding-day ! I have not been to bed yet, and I am to be a bridesmaid to-day, so instead of looking fresh and fair, I shall look pale and wan with sitting up ! No, I shall not ; I know I shall not ; because I am so happy !

We have had three of the bridesmaids staying in the house for a fortnight ; the others came yesterday, and Maggie and myself make up the eight. If Charlotte could have helped it, certainly I should not have been one. She said, it would 'look so,' if I were not to be a bridesmaid, so 'she supposed I must ;' though she was 'dreadfully afraid that I should do something *outré*, or give way to my usual *gaucherie*, or make some speech at the *déjeûner* which would make everyone at the

table stare.' I will try and not do anything of the kind to-day; I will try and please Charlotte.

Aunt Gretta has been busy from morning to-night with the arrangements and dresses. We, the bridesmaids, are to wear white corded silks, with white lace, looped up with sprigs of heather and blue-bell. This is in compliment to Mr. Retnor's Scotch descent. (Is he supposed to bear a resemblance to either blue-bell or heather? I should say he was more like — no, I *will not*.) Charlotte is to wear white satin, veil, wreath; all *à règle*.

I have seen all her things. I asked Aunt Gretta to show them to me one day when Charlotte was out. I did want to see them, and try and feel for a moment what her feeling must be like. I wonder if she is happy! It seems so strange to hear her cool business-like way of entering into every detail. She examined all her presents as a person would her marketings, speculating how much each would cost, and if it were worth the money.

Then, when her dress came home, the first thing she did was to look at the hem and the seams to see if the dressmaker had done her work well, and she actually sent it back to C——, because she discovered about an inch where the stitches were slipped! ‘Not,’ she said, ‘that she could not have done it herself better than any dressmaker, but people must be taught to do their work well, and not allowed to think that anything would do; they would find it would not, if they came to have dealings with her.’ She made all the arrangements with the extra servants herself, insisting on poor meek Aunt Gretta not doing it, for she would ‘be imposed upon to any extent,’ and she ‘meant the servants to see that they were not coming there to sit with their hands before them all day long.’ She and Mr. Retnor discuss every arrangement before other people, as if they were talking about politics, and never seem to have any more understanding with each other than any other two in the room; no eyes lighted up, or

sweet touch of hands, or — ; what stupid nonsense I am writing ! I won't put another word, but lock up my book and go to bed.

Friday, December 25.

All over and done ! Charlotte was married this morning, and they have started for Paris.

It is two o'clock in the morning ! Really, Saturday, the 26th, but I am not sleepy. I must write a little about yesterday.

The bridal party was punctual to the moment. How could they be otherwise with Charlotte's warning sounding in their ears ? The last thing she said to us last night, before we left the drawing-room, was to be sure to be in good time to-morrow ; she could not do with unpunctual people, 'we must be ready to the moment.' And this was before Mr. Retnor !

Papa, and one of the curates from Long-farm, held service for Christmas-day in the church at eight. I was up in very good time.

and saw that it was a beautiful, bright morning. Great red beams from the rising sun flooded all my room, and the icicles glistened and gleamed, and the white frost blurred and arabesqued the window-panes. I did not sit over my fire, but as soon as I was ready I ran to Gypsie, and found that Reynolds had already dressed him. Not for the day ; I had privately informed Reynolds that *that* was my work, and I should do it. We had a scamper down the broad walk and up by the shrubberies before anyone knew we were up ; and after we had had some breakfast, I thought I would venture into Charlotte's room, and be the first to wish her a happy Christmas. I confess I did it with trembling, but then I thought she perhaps would not find fault on her wedding-day.

I took my present in my hand, and went to her door. I had kept my present until now, because I thought I would rather give it on the very morning. I had had it made on purpose for her. It was a very costly gold bracelet,

with a locket attached, and inside the locket is a portrait of mamma, and on the reverse, a device beautifully worked in hair, and containing some of each of our hair—papa's, mamma's, Maggie's, Gypsie's, and mine. Dr. Vanny got it made for me in London, and very beautiful it is. What a lovely face mamma had, but so sad! Dr. Vanny had the miniature taken from a portrait in his possession. I remembered that one day he told me he had a portrait of mamma, so I asked him to get me this done. I wonder, by the way, how *he* came to have a likeness of mamma! I should like to know, but I don't think I could ask him. I could not help noticing, when he brought me this bracelet, what a long look he gave the face in the locket.

I knocked at Charlotte's door, and she said, 'Come in ;' and when I went in, she *did* look astonished. She was not up.

'Whatever do you want, Maude?' she said, 'Is anything the matter, that you have come in and disturbed me?'

‘It is just nine o’clock,’ I said, ‘and I have come to wish you a very happy Christmas, Charlotte.’

‘Is that all?’ she said. ‘I think you might have been more considerate for once in your life, Maude, and on my wedding-day too! I ordered Reynolds to bring me my breakfast at nine; could you not have left me alone until then?’

‘I wanted to kiss you, Charlotte, and wish you much happiness, and give you my present,’ and I laid the bracelet on the bed.

‘Dear me! You will have to give me a kiss in the vestry along with the others, I suppose, when we are signing the names. I should think that will be enough! Put the bracelet on the dressing-table; I will look at it by-and-by, if I have time. How much did you give for it? A great deal more than you ought to have done, I have no doubt. You always do things by extremes, and then you are out at the elbows.’

‘But I shall not be out at the elbows to-

day,' and I tried to speak gaily, 'for you know I shall have a new dress on.'

'And I have no doubt you will get it torn or spotted all over before the day is out,' she said. 'You are sure to spill your champagne. I do hope, Maude, that you really will make an effort for once in your life, and not give way to any bad temper at breakfast; you must try for the sake of the family.'

'I will try,' I said, pressing my lips firmly together. 'Can I do anything for you, Charlotte ?'

'You can shut the door when you go out; you always leave the doors open; and a cold morning like this! Put some more coal on the fire, and draw the blind up. Is it a fine day ?'

'Beautiful!' I said; 'clear and bright and sunshiny! Just such a day as it ought to be for a wedding-day, Charlotte.'

"Ought to be!" You always talk such silly nonsense, Maude! There's no "ought" about the matter. If it rains, it rains, and

if it doesn't it doesn't, and there's an end of it.'

'Can I do anything for you, Charlotte?' I asked again. 'Do let me, if I can.'

'Only don't disturb me again; as if I shouldn't be tired enough with travelling a cold day like this, without you having come in now! Stay, you may go and sit in the dining-room, as I can't come down this morning, and watch those fresh waiters; and see that they don't idle all the time away, and you can look after the champagne; one of them would have helped himself last night, but I was watching him, and he saw I was.'

I lingered one minute; I could not help it—the words would come—'Are you very happy, Charlotte?'

Charlotte opened her eyes to their fullest extent. 'Well,' she said, 'are you going to favour me with some of your delightful sentimentalisms? You can keep them for your own wedding-day, Maude, I assure you; I don't need them. I sincerely hope, for Captain

Marshall's sake, that you will get a little common sense before that day arrives. Do please, shut the door.'

I did so ; and sat down on the mat outside, without thinking what I was doing. My cheeks were burning and my eyes were full. Not one kind word ! But I did not care so much for that as for what she had said about Captain Marshall. He has been staying at the hotel the last week, and I knew that he was to be the groomsman, with whom I was to walk that day, but I had never given a thought to the matter. I believe he has been here and with me constantly during the past week. I had quite forgotten what he might think, and what other people might think about it. I have never thought about him one moment since——Oh dear ! I ought to have thought, of course I ought !

I sat outside Charlotte's door until I heard footsteps. I ran to my own room. Breakfast was in the breakfast-room for those who wished to have it there, and those who did

not, had it in their own rooms. I dressed in very good time, and then I went to Gypsie. He did look so lovely when he was dressed. I could do nothing but kiss him again and again. He wore Highland costume, made of rich black velvet, and his long ringlets fell almost to his waist, and his large wistful eyes shone out from the golden cloud, like stars from a white mist. Dear, precious little Gypsie ! Earth never saw a fairer sight than you, as you looked this morning, and Heaven might have claimed you, just as you were, for her own !

When we were ready I went to Aunt Gretta, and then to Maggie, and they both found me plenty to do until the carriages came. Maggie had three servants waiting upon her, and I am sure she could have done quite well with three more. She told me she had been dressing ever since seven o'clock ! Certainly, when all was done, her appearance rewarded her diligence ; so perhaps she thought the time well spent.

I ran into my room for an instant before I went downstairs ; just one moment to stand before my glass and see if it were likely——. I don't think I ever noticed myself much before ; I am sure it was not vanity that led me now to look at myself. But I was glad,— glad that the masses of wavy hair were so black and glossy ; glad that the eye which had a strange light this morning, was so deep and blue. It only seemed right to me at that moment, that everything which loved him should be fair.

I dared not stay. We started punctually at the moment. Such an array of carriages, and the houses streaming with flags and banners, and everyone in their best ! It seemed as if all the people from the three villages, besides strangers, had come to see the marriage of Dr. Maynard's daughter with the Rev. Reginald McPherson Retnor.

Of course the church was crowded ; and as Charlotte walked up the aisle with papa, the organ pealed forth, and a marriage hymn

swelled to the very roof, and filled the church with harmony. The hymn was not sung by the village choirs, but by the children of the three schools, who had been trained for the occasion, and those children's voices thrilled my soul with an unspeakable emotion.

How long I had forgotten everything about me but that hymn I do not know; but I was speedily brought back to earth, and that by a process which, of all others, I had learned to dread—a look of thunder from Charlotte's eyes; right through her veil it penetrated into my being. I looked hastily round to perceive the cause. I was in my wrong place! I saw it in an instant. Charlotte, true to herself, had glanced at the party as we formed round the altar to see that we were in proper order, and had discovered instantly that I was wrong. It really was not my fault; it was that stupid Captain Marshall! Why had he put me there? But it would not have made the least matter if only they would have left me alone. What did it

signify whether I stood second or eighth ? However, it was necessary to alter, if Charlotte were to be married at all, for it was certain she would not allow the service to go on until we were all in order ; so I managed to get into my right place with a little confusion, and going very red about it How that atrocious white silk did rustle as I moved ! It seemed as if it were proclaiming to the whole assembly the awkwardness and stupidity of my unfortunate self !

At last the service commenced, and by the time the address had been gone through, I dared to lift up my eyes and look a little about me. Of course, everyone in the church would be looking at the bride. No ; every one was not looking at Charlotte ; *he* was not. He was looking at me with a strange look ! Was it sad, or was it a little reproving, or what was it ? He was very pale, very serious, that was all I could notice ; and I did not raise my eyes again from the scarlet cushion at my feet until the service was over,

and Charlotte was made—fast and firm—into Mrs. Reginald McPherson Retnor.

I hope she felt happy ! From the bottom of my heart, I hope she did ! I wish everyone could be happy, and Charlotte most of all. She will alter now ; she will be more loving now. She must be ; it cannot be otherwise ; she will not have me to try her, and she will feel all day long that she is one person's constant care and thought. Will she ? Is she so ? That is the question ! Oh, Charlotte, Charlotte ! I would not be you for worlds upon worlds ! Give me anguish, pain, separation, death, and the grave, if I might but know, for one hour, that I was loved as I love at this moment !

There was such confusion, and noise, and laughing in the vestry, that I cannot remember what was said or done ; I believe I was not thinking about it at all ; I hope I did not do anything more foolish or *distracte*. I can't remember that I did, so I shall rest in the blessed conviction that I did *not*. I remember

that I dared not venture near Charlotte, for I was certain that she would not have forgotten my mistake at the altar; and her sharp speeches before other people do make me so uncomfortable, so I thought the wisest plan was not to run the risk of one. Also, I remember that Gypsie looked the personification of loveliness; everybody said so, therefore I must be right for once. And I remember that Captain Marshall said some very ridiculous things to me every time he had the chance and thought that no one else could hear him; which things I also pretended not to hear, or, if I did hear, not to understand.

And after all the signatures had been made, and everything else done that was proper to be done, I had to undergo the horrible ordeal of walking down the long path to the porch, leaning on Captain Marshall's arm, under a blazing scarlet awning, adorned with mottoes, and evergreens, and flowers, and resplendent at the porch with a grand red and golden inscription on a white

ground—‘ Long Life and Happiness.’ Where all those flowers were procured from in the month of December I cannot think. I should think every greenhouse for ten miles round must have been despoiled, to say nothing of flowers ordered from London.

Only one look—just one little look as we were leaving. I knew where he stood, and I saw him looking at me again—the same enquiring, half-sad, half-surprised look—and we drove away.

When we reached the Hall, we were greeted by some inspiriting music from the brass band stationed on the lawn. Poor fellows ! I should think they must have been cold. And then I had to sit for three mortal hours, with Captain Marshall on one side of me, and Mr. Somebody-else on the other, and Maggie and her devoted admirer, Captain Snuffins, opposite, and listen to toasts, and compliments, and speeches, and absurdities, until my head ached from very weariness, and I could find no emotion of any kind within my heart, except

that of envy of the brass band outside, with anyone of whom I would gladly have changed places, cold and frosty as it was. Dr. Vanny's speech was the only one worth listening to, and Gypsie's face the only one worth looking at. Maggie and Captain Snuffins appeared to be in the third heavens ; and so we sat, until the hour of release was signalled by the Rev. R. M. Retnor drawing out his watch, and intimating to his bride the advisability of her retiring to prepare for the journey. Upon which the eight bridesmaids, animated by one impulse, rose *en masse*, and there was a most tremendous confusion and scraping of chairs, and rustling of dresses, until the bride, surrounded by her maidens, withdrew—like the moon disappearing with her satellites.

I wonder how Charlotte felt when she saw Mr. Retnor draw out his watch ; it always seems to me that that action must give one such a queer sensation. I wonder how I should feel if—folly and delusion ! What was I saying ?

'The happy pair started at four o'clock, *en route* for the Continent,' so the papers stated the next day—a succinct and orthodox way of finishing the whole matter.

I thought it was considered an impossibility for such an event as a wedding to pass off without tears, and yet I could not see the least chance of there being any on this occasion. Maggie, I was certain, would not cry. I had heard her discussing the advisability of so doing with one of her sister-bridesmaids the week before. She was in favour of it, on account of it looking so very interesting; but then she was against it on account of it leaving red eyes. The fear of this disfigurement overbalanced the other consideration, so Maggie's eyes remained clear and bright. Had Aunt Gretta been at liberty, she would have cried the whole time, I have no doubt; but she was so very busy, she forgot all about it. Nothing appeared more improbable than that Charlotte should shed a tear, and it appeared to me likely, after all, that unless I

cried, a wedding could take place without tears. I did not feel any choking sensation of grief, nor did I endeavour to force it; when, just as Charlotte was taking her leave, Gypsie relieved my anxiety on the point by bursting into tears, which brought this remonstrance from the bride: 'Why, you silly child! what in the world are you crying about?'

'I don't know,' sobbed poor little Gypsie, and I thought I did not either.

'Don't be foolish, Gypsie,' said Mrs. Retnor; 'if you let tears fall on that new velvet tunic you'll spoil it; and I don't know how much it cost! Wipe them up quickly before you spot it;' and with this parting injunction Mrs. R. M. Retnor took her leave.

I carried Gypsie off and laid him down on my bed, and soothed him, and asked him why he was crying.

'I don't know,' said Gypsie again. 'Is Charlotte very happy, Maude?'

'I hope so,' I said.

'Should you be very happy, Maude, if

you left us all and went away with Mr. Retnor ?'

'Oh, no, no,' I cried, so lustily, that Gypsie looked up in amazement, and I was so ashamed, that I hid my face, and said no more.

Then I had to change my dress and go down to the schools. Nearly twenty of us went, and a pretty sight it was to see the children enjoying themselves, and the well-lighted, beautifully-decorated school-rooms. The merriment and noise were endless. Mr. Farren was not there ; I saw that at a glance. I heard his name mentioned repeatedly : 'Where is Mr. Farren ?' 'Mr. Farren said we were to do so-and-so.' 'Mr. Farren was, &c., &c.' He must have left only just before we entered, for it seemed to be understood that he was in the room, and they were only just beginning to perceive that he was not. Why had he left ? I thought I should see him there. It was better I did not. I will not write about it.

We went into another room to see the women at tea. Then the gentlemen went to the large public room in the village where the men had been dining, and we returned home to help at the tea in the servants' hall ; and then we danced with the people until after twelve o'clock.

And now I am quietly sitting in my own room. I have just been in to look at Gypsie ; he is fast asleep, tired out with the revels of the day. No one, I think, has been happier than he. Trotting here, and there, and everywhere, he was our sunshine long after the sun, 'a crimson flood, had bathed the glowing west.'

So this day is over. Our ball is to be held next week ; Maggie is wild in the anticipation of it. How very glad I shall be when it is all over, everyone gone, and the house quiet ! I have such bright hopes that papa may love me more now—perhaps a little more. At least, I am anticipating that he may find out that I am not altogether a

nuisance—that I am not altogether bad ; that all the quarrelling that ever occurred has not been entirely ‘Maude’s fault.’ I intend to be so punctual, so orderly, so wise, so thoughtful, that he will see that there are at least some little germs of good in ‘Maude.’ I have a gladsome feeling in my heart that perhaps the coming year may usher in a new state of things for me with papa. I only ask to be moderately useful, moderately loved. That is all, nothing more. Nothing? Yes, just something. Only now and then—once or twice—to see him, to speak to him! That is all I want—all I ask! My love, my love! God give you a happy New Year!

## CHAPTER XVII.

Thursday, December 31.

FIVE o'clock in the morning ! Sleepy and very cross ; yet such is the force of habit that I cannot go to bed without opening my book to put down a few lines. The ball is over at last. That is a comfort, and a still greater comfort it is to take off my flowing robes and all the array of flowers and jewels and fling them into delightful confusion into a corner, and don my dear old flannel dressing-gown, and toast my feet over the fire.

Oh dear, oh dear ! I did mean to be so good-tempered, and I find myself so cross. Papa would say it is the 'carnal mind at enmity with, &c., &c.' Perhaps it is ; I don't know, but I feel very much inclined to be at

enmity with all the world, especially with Captain Marshall. Why should he choose this night of all nights, when I was really trying to be amiable ? I see in my last entry I did resolve to be good and amiable; I thought it was a virtuous resolution, and I would especially put it in force during the ball, because I disliked it so much. Alas ! what fruit it has borne ! I must have been *too* amiable to give Captain Marshall the courage which he declares he has been trying to find for a long time, but could not ; 'I was always so—he didn't know what, in my manner.'

I do not think I can blame myself. Since he came this time I have never wasted a thought on him ; how could I, when—. However, it is done now, and I am heartily sorry for it, and I told him so as gently as I could. He goes away to-morrow. He and his brother-officers have been staying in the neighbourhood the last fortnight, and I regret the matter with my whole heart. But, oh !

how glad I am that this did not occur six months ago !

Wednesday, January 6.

It will soon be a fortnight since Charlotte was married, and it has been a happy time. Aunt Gretta has been busy putting household matters into their usual train. Maggie has been engaged with a beloved friend—one of the bridesmaids—who only left us this morning, the last of the train. We have been out to so many dances and dinners since Charlotte left, but I got through very well.

If the evenings have been what I did not like, the days have been happy with Gypsie. It has been clear, frosty weather, and we have taken long walks together. Across the dim, distant moorland one day ; another day up the hills, white and silvered with frost ; then through our favourite woods, whose bare arms and skeleton figures could not hide Heaven from our view. Papa has been busy in the village, so that he has had no time to notice me ; it is like a new life.

And I have not forgotten my poor friends, for I knew Mr. Farren left the day after Charlotte's wedding, and I could go about the village without the chance of meeting him. I do not know why I should not wish to meet him, only I think I would rather not. By the time he comes back I shall be quite strong and well. I hope the next week will be as happy as this has been.

I have had two letters from Captain Marshall since he left—such long, earnest letters. I wish he would think no more about it. Perhaps he will not now he has my answers. The village school begins again in another week !

Sunday, January 24.

Such a happy Sunday ! Papa has been away all day, and we have had the clergyman from the place where papa is. A cheerful, happy, simple old man ; and his sermons were just like himself. ' Little children, love one another,' was his text in the morning. Maggie would not go to church ; she was ' too tired,'

she said ; so Gypsie, Aunt Gretta, and I went together.

The last fortnight has been so happy ! I never think of the future ; only just the joy of the present. Gypsie's lessons have begun again. I wonder if it is my fancy, or if it is a fact, that Mr. Farren seems to have changed a little. He has lost that frank, open expression which went straight to the heart, and I have noticed once or twice that even Gypsie has looked up in his face with surprise. What was it that Gypsie noticed about him ? Gypsie's lessons seem to be slightly different too. Mr. Farren never gives way now to the nice little digressions and chats which they used to have. He seems to keep Gypsie more strictly just to the lesson, and he is off the moment it is done—never stops to say a pleasant word to Aunt Gretta, which he always used to do. He seems distant and stiff, and Aunt Gretta has remarked it to me more than once. Of course, it is quite right that he should be so, if he choose ; still, I

wish——. Aunt Gretta regrets those pleasant little chats so much, for no one treats her with the marked respect which Mr. Farren does. And one day I heard papa say something like this, that he thought 'Mr. Farren seemed a little changed; he did not quite know wherein the change lay. Not that he had any dereliction of duty to complain of; he was happy to say that nothing of that kind had as yet fallen under his notice. Still, there was something which indicated to an acute observer like himself that that extreme contentment with which Mr. Farren had at first appeared to contemplate his position was, owing to some cause not apparent, slightly impaired.' I believe these were the very words papa used. I remember them distinctly.

I think Mr. Farren—there, I find that after all my resolutions never to write about him, I have been doing so ever since I sat down. Even though it is only in my diary, which no one will ever see, perhaps it is not

right. It seems, somehow, that *that* name always comes up when I begin to write. I will not do it. I will put away my book altogether rather than do it. It will be a little hard, for as long as I can remember I have always written down everything that has happened, and all my thoughts; but I will lock up my book now, and see how I can manage without it altogether, at least for a time.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Friday, April 2.

MORE than ten weeks since I have written a word! And now—no, my heart will not break; there is no such thing as a *breaking* heart—no such cessation of suffering—no such calm! One could live on if one's heart might break, but it will not. It will feel and suffer and ache to the end. The end!—that is a long way off! Hush, hush!—what am I saying?

But he might have given me one word—a cold ‘Good-bye!’ Just one touch of his hand to help, to encourage, to strengthen me! But then he would not know that I needed it. Why do I blame him? He did not know, thank God—thank God!

It was such a help to me. I tried to do

right because he did right, and wanted others to do so. 'The royalty of right-doing.' Day by day I grew more patient, more gentle, more watchful. I am sure I did. I could bear anything when I knew he would have said it was right to bear it ; I could do anything when I knew he would have said it was right to do it. I know it was folly, it was delusion, it was madness ! but oh, it was such a sweet delusion, such happy madness, and it is all gone—all over for ever !

I will say no more. Fall down, hot tears, and blur and blot the book ; it does not matter the least ; you may flow on for ever unheeded ; no one will ask the cause ; no one will pity or help me any more ! I must go on the same from day to day. They have said that I was improved, that I had grown kinder, better,—and now, and now—.

Saturday, May 15.

It is long since I have written ; I could not write. I think I must have been ill ! I

don't know. I cannot tell how I have been. My head aches so badly that it seems a difficult matter to do anything now. I am weak—very weak, I am afraid, because I look so changed. I should not have noticed it, but Dr. Vanny has been here so much lately, and he will not leave me alone. If he would just be quiet, and let me quietly go away! I don't think it could be longer than six months at the least; but *that*, I suppose, is a morbid, wrong feeling. But can I help it? It is not my *fault* that I cannot sleep, or eat, or walk. I am not ill, though Dr. Vanny insists that I am, and papa was very anxious at first.

Since Charlotte came back I have not got on nearly so well. At first I did not feel it. How could I, when—but all that is over now.

Where did I leave off? I will look back, and try and put down all that has happened. It will be a little relief; it may help me to bear this dull, heavy pain. I will tire my heart out; I will rouse it to recall the past,

and then perhaps it will cease aching. I will weary my eyes, and then perhaps they will close and give me some rest, and my hands will not clasp each other so hardly and tightly.

It is May now—bright and beautiful, they say. I cannot feel it; how I wish I could! I wish the fields, and hills, and trees, and flowers, and birds, and skies looked to me as they used to do! I wish I could just for one moment feel the rush of delight I used to have when I looked out on the early spring. I wish I could feel something of that joy that Gypsie and I had when we found the first violet and gathered the first spray of hawthorn, and watched the chestnut tree and the sycamore—*my* two trees—unfold the first tender green, and their pink buds, and then their broad green leaf and full flower. Will it never come again? If I live for years, shall I never again feel glad to be with Gypsie in the woods, ~~or~~ sit on the brook-side, or watch the sunset from the hill-top? Dear

little Gypsie ! It is when I think of him that I can weep. When he comes and puts his soft arms round me, and looks into my face, and says, ' Poor sister Maude ! why do you look *so* ? ' then I can weep, and it does me good.

When did I write last ? Let me see : in January, and I was so happy ! Charlotte came home in February, and they went to their new house. Charlotte comes up here every day, and she seems to take as much part in matters as when she lived here. I think Aunt Gretta defers to her more because she is a married woman. She certainly assumes more, and Mr. Retnor is constantly here. I did think Charlotte might be a little improved by her marriage, but I really cannot believe that she is. Mr. Retnor has grown more disagreeable than ever. I ought not to say so. Perhaps I should not always put down just the truth, but I am very sore and weary.

I did not feel these things much when

Charlotte first returned. I went on so happily, until one day, when Captain Marshall came over unexpectedly. His regiment was ordered from —, and was going to be quartered at —. So he came, as he said, to make 'one last appeal.' Why did he? Unfortunately, I was out, and he saw papa, and had a long talk with him, and papa promised to speak to me. 'To speak to me!' Ah, Captain Marshall, how little you knew what that involved! Had you done, you would never have brought it on me; for you do love me, and you would never have given me that to bear.

Papa was very angry, and Charlotte too. Perhaps I deserved it; I do not know. I did not think it was *wrong* not to tell papa about Captain Marshall; I rather thought that it was a point of honour not to tell; but papa was very much displeased. I did not care much for what Charlotte said, because I do not think that it is her place to be hard upon me now that she has a house of her own; perhaps this vexed her more.

I remember every word papa said, every look he gave me ; and I remember, how well ! everything in that room. All is clear and fresh before me. It is always so with me ; when any circumstance has particularly impressed me in connection with any place, the least thing about that place is indelibly written on my memory. I remember exactly how the study looked. It was in the beginning of last month, April. There was a cheerful fire burning, and the recumbent bronze dogs on the hearth glittered in the blaze ; the morning sun looked merrily in through the windows ; Pontiff had selected that square of the carpet where the sun's rays fell the warmest, and he lay at full length enjoying the heat, with his eyes half closed, and his ears pricked up when papa's voice grew a little louder, which it very seldom did. If he would only have been angry and done with it, it would not have been half so bad as that still, unvaried, deep monotone. There was papa's half-finished MS. sermon lying on the table, kept warm by three

prodigious volumes of divinity and theology, one lying on one side of it, two on the other ; his copy of the Greek Testament, his annotated Bible, and some strange book lying open, the pages covered with what looked like pot-hooks, cabalistic characters, and hieroglyphs. There was a stray slip of paper, on which some notes had been jotted down ; there was his massive silver inkstand, and by it his snuff-box, half open, and one speck of snuff marred the whiteness of an unwritten sheet of paper which lay there ; the crimson cloth, with the big, heavy tassels, hung down over the table as if ashamed of itself for being such a comfortable, home-like looking thing ; there was his study-chair of carved oak and crimson velvet standing as erect and imposing as its owner ; the escritoire matched the chair. The large prints of saints, martyrs, and fathers hung 'plumb' against the walls—in their right places to the tenth of an inch ; those faces with the large, deep eyes and agonised expression, which used to fill my childish soul with deepest awe

and veneration whenever I was in papa's study. I think they rather helped me that morning. Each carved chair stood against the wall at unvarying intervals, and papa's slippers (their pattern is a crusader's cross worked in red upon a blue ground) reposed on a footstool in the darkest corner of the room, which footstool has, from time immemorial, been sacred to their occupancy.

It is very rarely indeed that I am in papa's study ; never, I think, except when I am sent for on some special occasion ; and so I believe it comes, that I regard that room with something of the same feeling which a man, who has the balance in his book on the wrong side, must look upon the 'sweating room' at his banker's.

I remember Charlotte's dress and papa's too. Papa never indulged in 'undress ;' he never wears a loose coat in which he can loll back in his easy-chair and put himself into any attitude he chooses. He always sits quite upright ; at least whenever I see him. That

morning he wore a handsome broadcloth of the most clerical cut, and a spotless and very stiff tie. Charlotte wore a rich black silk. I remember how her other hand played with her wedding-ring all the time she talked. Ah me ! I wondered then, and I wonder now, did not that ring suggest one thought, one feeling which might make her kind to me ? But then she did not know—she did not know ! No, thank God ! no one knows, and never will ! So they believed it was only my obstinacy and contradiction, and, believing that, they must have thought me very obstinate indeed.

What made papa angry was not so much my refusing Captain Marshall as my not being able to give any reason for so doing. That I did not love him was no reason to papa, so it was set down to my usual wilfulness. Oh, my love, my love, it is not so ! I should not be worthy to love you, if it were so ! I strive to do right for your sake ! I strive to be what, if I were going to be your wife, you would have me be ! Believe it not of me !

My heart cries out against it ! I am not what they say I am ! It was the thought of you kept me up all through that interview ; it was the thought of you which made me keep my lips shut, and the remembrance of your words which made me patient, steadfast ! Yes, *steadfast* ; I will be that, though I shall always be just 'Miss Maude' to him. If ever he should think of me for an instant, it will be just 'Miss Maude—Dr. Maynard's daughter'—nothing more ! And he—and he—what is he to me ? Would to God I had slept cold and still by my mother's side, long ere I had ever seen him !

Hide it all up my heart, safe and deep for ever. Hold it until that 'day'—the day which he believes will surely come ! Will he know then that I have loved him so truly, so faithfully 'until death' ? I do not know. I only know that I am hungry, famished, weary ; that my hands are stretched out all day long—in vain, in vain !

Sunday, May 16.

I have put down nothing about Mr. Farren's leaving. He has a week's holiday at Easter. Easter fell very early this year—a day or two after Captain Marshall left. It seems so strange that I have not spoken once to Mr. Farren since that December night when—. I don't mean really not spoken, but what I mean is never spoken except the ordinary civilities when he came into the library to give Gypsie his lessons. He was here on the Tuesday, the day Captain Marshall left Stonecross. He was not expected again for a week, because the following Friday would be Good Friday; and it was on the Thursday morning, the day before Good Friday, that among his other letters, papa had one from Mr. Farren. Charlotte and Mr. Retnor were breakfasting with us, and papa remarked to Charlotte, as he took the letter up, 'I think this is Mr. Farren's handwriting; I hope it is not to request my consent to a longer holiday. It always lowers a man somewhat in my esti-

mation when he is capable of desiring to obtain for mere gratification a longer immunity from work than is requisite for needful rest. “The diligent hand maketh rich.”

‘If his letter is to ask for that, I would not have him back at all, papa,’ Charlotte said.

‘His services are, I confess,’ said papa, ‘much too valuable to be lightly dispensed with.’ And then Mr. Retnor put in his word, with all, and more than all, his usual pompous familiarity. ‘My dear sir, you sadly overrate Mr. Farren’s worth. I am convinced it is this that makes him so conceited. It would do him a world of good to show him that we can do quite as well without him as with him; there’s nothing at all which I enjoy so much as taking the conceit out of a man and letting him see that he’s not at all what he thinks himself. I never could account for your partiality for Mr. Farren.’

‘I am not aware,’ said papa, ‘that I have ever evinced undue partiality for Mr. Farren

or for any human being. Undue partiality is a mark of an ill-regulated mind, and as such is a weakness much to be deplored and deprecated. Of this weakness, I believe, I can safely be acquitted.'

Mr. Retnor coughed and a-hemmed, and took a large mouthful of buttered roll, for which action I really admired him ; it showed so much self-knowledge. To a person of his temperament, it was the very best way of stopping himself from making any further remarks. And all this time—and such a long time it seemed !—Papa was holding Mr. Farren's letter in his hand, and not reading it. Nor did he read it at all then, for, something else attracting his attention, he laid it down, and no more remarks were made about it.

As usual, I did not see papa again until dinner-time, and the moment he came in, I saw he looked annoyed. What was it that made me feel sure that his annoyance was connected with Mr. Farren's letter ? I cannot tell ; but I thank Heaven that the convic-

tion came certainly and surely. Aunt Gretta's voice roused me.

'Maude, are you ill?' she said.

'No, thank you, Aunt Gretta.'

'But I am sure you are,' she said, angrily, 'so don't say you are not.' Aunt Gretta is never sure about anything but about people being ill; she went on compassionating me—'Poor child! I really believe you are fretting about Captain Marshall! You haven't looked like yourself for days and days.'

I am glad she thought so; I did not contradict her, and Maggie began to laugh.

'Perhaps Maude is repenting,' she said.

'It is a bad habit,' said papa, 'to class results arising from other causes under the head of physical indisposition. I cannot perceive that anything ails Maude but what might be at once removed by due attention and regard to the advice of those most interested in her.'

This was a kind of speech often addressed to me, to which I did not know what answer

to make, so made none. Aunt Greta did not seem to understand it either. She went on—

‘ You really must consent to be doctored, Maude ; in fact, I shall send for Dr. Vanny, if you don’t look very different soon. Not that I have very much faith in him ; I could do quite as well myself any day, and I am not ashamed to say that I think I could do better sometimes. Still, a doctor is a doctor, and, Dr. Vanny being ours, we must try to be satisfied and put up with what we don’t quite like in him.’

‘ I like Dr. Vanny ; don’t you, Maude ?’ said Gypsie.

‘ Very much indeed,’ I said.

I wonder what there was in the tone to make my little Gypsie slip his hand into mine, under cover of the tablecloth, and look up into my face, and say, ‘ *Don’t* be poorly, sister Maude !’

I could not speak. I tried with my water to swallow down the choking sensation in my throat, and before I had finished papa began,

‘ I have had a letter this morning which has caused me the gravest annoyance, and excited, I am grieved to say, feelings of much indignation in my mind.’

Aunt Gretta happily forgot all about my ailments for the time being ; she laid down her knife and fork in astonishment to hear what had been productive of such unhappy results to papa ; Maggie exclaimed, and Gypsie looked up in wonderment.

‘ I shall advert to it more at large by-and-by,’ continued papa ; ‘ at present I shall only remark that this morning I have had a stronger and more conclusive evidence than ever that “pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” ’

This was a hint that no more was to be said on the matter until James had withdrawn, so we remained in silent and profitable meditation upon the results of pride and a haughty spirit. Oh, how long that dinner-time seemed, and longer still the pause after dessert was placed on the table ! At length papa began—

‘I have had a letter this morning from Mr. Farren which has caused me more astonishment than I can possibly find words to express. I perceive the confidence which I have reposed in him has been misplaced ; the attentions which I have shown him have been wasted ; the notice which I have favoured him with has not been valued or appreciated ; and the regard which I have exhibited for him has been altogether undeserved.’

What this speech described or portended, I could not imagine ; but dear little Gypsie, only gathering from it that papa was, for some reason, displeased with Mr. Farren, burst into a flood of frightened tears, and when I put out my hand to wipe them away, he could only sob, ‘Poor Mr. Farren !’

Papa was considerably disturbed. He cannot bear to see Gypsie cry ; it threw him entirely out of the train of thought then uppermost. He could not go on until Gypsie had ceased crying, nor could he understand why Gypsie should weep over

any sorrow which was not distinctly and entirely personal.

‘ My dear little boy,’ he said, ‘ you must not cry. My little Gypsie has done no wrong. Papa is not angry with him. Why are you crying, Gypsie ? ’

‘ Are you angry with Mr. Farren, papa ? ’ said Gypsie, piteously looking up into the face above him. ‘ Poor Mr. Farren, who is so kind to me ? ’

‘ Mr. Farren has gone away, Gypsie, and will never return. I do well to be angry.’

‘ Gone away ! My Mr. Farren gone away ! But won’t you forgive him, papa ? It is so nice to forgive ! ’

Papa put Gypsie down from his knee. I imagine he was at a loss what answer to make. He took some fine grapes from a dish, and put them into Gypsie’s hands, saying, ‘ There, my darling, run with those into the garden,’ and Gypsie obeyed at once.

‘ Whatever has Mr. Farren done ? ’ said Aunt Gretta. ‘ I always expected he would

overwork himself and take a fever ; or it is that house ! I always knew it ! It is so damp ; all outside show and no inside comfort ; the damp has given him his death, and he is in a consumption ! Poor man ! poor man ! and no one to nurse him !'

' More likely he has got married without asking leave,' said Maggie. ' Papa would not be angry with a man for going off in a consumption.'

Papa frowned majestically.

' Margaret, your remarks are ill-timed, and pardon my remarking, Gretta, that yours are not to the point. I do not wonder that no surmise can approach the truth. Such a return for all the kindness I have shown Mr. Farren is, I acknowledge, most unexpected. Knowing the high value at which I rate—I am now afraid very unduly—his services, he has, in the most unexpected and unprecedented manner, abruptly quitted his situation without assigning any reason, without giving me any more notice than what I received this

morning, which is simply a brief note to the effect that he is not at liberty to return to his duties. Such a censurable and annoying occurrence is enough to produce feelings of extreme displeasure. I always accord every man perfect justice, therefore I must also state that he refuses to receive the salary due to him, and mentions two teachers, either of whom, he assures me, would well answer my purpose, provisionally. He also expresses his hope that the decision which he has been compelled to arrive at may not inconvenience me. I can only say that a few words of courtesy do not, in my opinion, afford any adequate excuse for such an action as that of which Mr. Farren has been guilty.'

‘What a queer thing!’ said Maggie. ‘I always thought he was flighty.’

‘I have no doubt,’ said Aunt Gretta, ‘that in his heart he felt the house damp, and did not like to complain, and so took this method of avoiding the subject. Ten to one he gets into a house a deal damper and draughtier.’

Papa passed over both these speeches in lofty silence.

‘I have now informed you,’ he continued, ‘of the source of my annoyance. Such conduct is reprehensible in the extreme, and bespeaks on Mr. Farren’s part an amazing deficiency of propriety and knowledge of what is becoming to his own position, and of what is due to mine. “Honour to whom honour is due.”’

‘What is to become of Gypsie, I wonder,’ said Maggie.

‘I conclude that Mr. Farren has not, in this particular, given our convenience a moment’s thought,’ said papa. ‘People who act with the inconsideration which he has shown cannot be expected to exhibit thoughtfulness for others.’

‘The next schoolmaster must teach him,’ suggested Aunt Gretta; ‘but he too will be sure to take cold in that house; and if he has rheumatism, which is most likely, he will not be able to walk up here.’

‘There is no necessity for anticipating a calamity which is not in the least likely to ensue,’ said papa ; ‘there is not the slightest probability that anyone who may come in Mr. Farren’s place will be able to fill it, in this particular. He was an exception to the generality of men in his position. I must acknowledge, in justice to him, that he was quite fitted to take a very different position to the one which he occupied here.’

At this moment Maggie exclaimed, ‘What on earth is the matter with you, Maude ? ’

Desperation nerved me to reply, ‘I haven’t felt well for weeks. I must have been knocked up at Charlotte’s wedding, and I walked a long way this evening, and feel very tired ; I should like to lie down, Aunt Gretta ;’ and I was at the door before Aunt Gretta could reply.

I managed to creep up to my own bed, and then all seems a mist. I remember distinctly every word that was uttered at that dinner, but I remember nothing after, except

that Dr. Vanny was in my room a long time that evening.

I can write about it now, and I think it is a relief to do so. I must do something. It seems to me that Heaven might have granted me only to see him once again—the old look, and the frank smile, and the keen glance that pierced through all disguises and shams, and took hold of the truth of a matter at once. It was not much to ask, but, little as it was, Heaven would not grant it me, would not hear my prayer! Spring with its freshness, summer with its bloom, autumn with its ripeness, and winter with its home-comforts and bright fires, will come and go, and will bring for me only the ‘never, never, whisper’d by the phantom years.’

It is when I sometimes think of that time—of the long winter evenings, of the closed curtains, and the ruddy firelight, and the bright hearth, and the arm-chair, and the warm slippers, and the rest after work—it is then, it is then that my heart, with its depth of

yearning, cries out with an exceeding great and bitter cry.

Those happy six months, from June to December! I live it all over again the moment I wake from broken sleep ; the remembrance of it haunts me in 'the dead unhappy night, and when the rain is on the roof ;' it follows me from room to room, from hour to hour, from place to place, and always I hear the 'never, never !' Ah ! the hopelessness of that word, the depth of its anguish, the power of its pain, the bitterness of its meaning !

It is all a great grief to Gypsie. He will sit on my knee silent for an hour, with his head on my shoulder, and only move to put his arms closer round me ; he feels there is something wrong, but he does not know what it is.

And he does miss his lessons so much ! He longs to have Mr. Farren back, and begs papa to write to him, and to say that Gypsie wants to see him. And he talks to me of

how we used to go to the churchyard together. A dozen times a day Gypsie brings it all home to my heart, and he does not know what he is doing. I cannot go to Mrs. Morris's grave now, but I pay a little girl in the village to go and do it for me. No one knows anything about it, for no one but Mr. Farren ever saw me there.

Aunt Gretta will not let me go to the Sunday-school now, so it has taken the duty from me. I am thankful for that. If she knew what long walks I take now, she would, I believe, forbid my going out at all ; but I cannot do without it. When that dreadful sense of oppression grows, and gathers, and lays its grasp on my brain, I cannot sit still. I go into the woods, and walk and walk until I can walk no more.

It is two months since *that* day, and it is spring now. The days are growing longer and longer, and the evenings are becoming balmy and sweet and mild. Everywhere there is the presence and the pulse of spring.

My brook has long since escaped from the cold hand which numbed it, and it sings now as merrily as ever. The earth looks very fair—full of hope, full of promise, full of life. It seems as if it had caught and was holding fast a smile from its Maker. Surely, that Maker is good! It is hard for me to believe it. It seems so strange that God should flood this earth with sunshine, and yet shut it all out of my heart; that every bow and tree and flower and blossom should be radiant with light and gladness, and all to me be dead and cold. It seems strange that the heavens should be glorious, the sunset golden, the moonlight soft and tender, and all in my soul should be darkness. It would have been better for me never to have been roused from my listless life, rather than to have the quickened flow only bring anguish and pain; better never to have seen the light rather than see it, and be again groping in darkness!

It is near sunset now; just the time when

Gypsie and I used to come from the church-yard. A very faint dimness is beginning to come over the garden. It is warm enough for me to sit by the open window. They have not yet returned from church ; they have gone to Longfarm. Gypsie has gone too ; he begged so hard to stay, but I would not let him. I wanted to be alone. I cannot be as I used to be with Gypsie. When I could be with him alone, I used to feel as young as he ; I cannot now. Yet, I am only twenty—twenty last birthday. I shall soon be twenty-one. It seems young—young for all the brightness to have gone ; young to have nothing to look forward to but the night, and then—perhaps then, even for me, the shadows may be lifted evermore.

The sunset glow is fading. The crimson beams are dying from the wood, the brook, the hill. The bright hues are passing from the clouds, the grey tint is falling ; one sudden lighting up of the heavens, one answering flush from the earth—it passes away.

That hush—which on the Sabbath evening in the country falls almost like the quiet which is felt in the chamber of the dying—is stealing over everything. The Sabbath is passing away. Oh, my God ! my God ! would that I might pass away as quietly and as noiselessly as Thy day is passing from the earth ! What hast Thou for me to do ? May I not be at rest ? Why not ? Answer me out of the eternal stillness, thou Mighty Power ! answer my cry ! Let it pierce Thy heavens and reach Thy ear ! Wilt Thou not hear me, Great Father ? No, no ; Thou dost not ! It is all in vain that I——

## CHAPTER XIX.

Tuesday, May 25.

I AM going from home, to Banton, to stay with Aunt Louise. It has come about in this way. Dr. Vanny has insisted upon my having change—insisted in such a way that papa has consented. Dr. Vanny is going with me. He says he has business beyond Banton, and has to go just now. I believe his business is all a feint, but if he did not go, papa would ; so I am very glad he is going with me. He says this visit ‘will put me all right.’ Put me all right ! Ah, Dr. Vanny, that is more than you or anyone else can do.

Papa has been so kind lately. I wonder why ? Perhaps he has seen that look which Aunt Gretta says she sees so constantly on

my face now—that look like mamma. I have always been very like her, they say, but they tell me I am so much more lately. Am I getting nearer her, I wonder?

I must be ill. Aunt Greta weeps over me, and doctors and nurses me, and quarrels with Dr. Vanny every day about me. Maggie comes into my room and compassionates me, and Charlotte does not come near me at all. Papa speaks quite tenderly sometimes to me. From all this, I gather that they must think me ill, that I must be ill, must feel ill. I do not know. I feel nothing but one intense, passionate, deep yearning just to see him once again—only once!—and then be still. I only ask this, but God is—hush, hush, my heart!

We are to start to Banton to-morrow. I am glad to go but for one thing—Gypsie! But about that I do not feel as I used to. I want to go away, and never, never return.

Banton is so healthy and salubrious, so famed for producing marvellous reprieves from sickness and wonderful cures, that Dr.

Vanny is sanguine about me. 'We shall bring you back cured, Maude,' he said, yesterday. But, Dr. Vanny, you know better! Often, lately, I have read something in your eyes—and I almost fear to ask myself what! Is it possible you have guessed? No, no! you know nothing, only this—that with all your skill you cannot cure me. At the best it will be but a patched life, a marred performance.

Aunt Louise's husband is a great invalid, but she insisted upon having me with her when she heard that I grew no better. And I know I shall be very much alone there, as Aunt Louise is so devoted to nursing her husband. And this is what I want.

Papa has a new schoolmaster; not either of those which *he* named; papa was too much offended to avail himself of any suggestion Mr. Farren might make. The new schoolmaster does not suit, and is going to leave; and this makes papa still more angry with Mr. Farren for putting them to such incon-

venience. Papa does not seem to understand that other people have their individual feelings, their particular circumstances, and their own views about matters. It does not seem to occur to him that a man like Mr. Farren is as likely to have independence of thought, and to adopt independence of action, as Dr. Maynard himself. I suppose it is natural temperament, fostered by long habit and constantly living among dependents and inferiors, which has resulted in an autocratic and arbitrary mode of thinking and dealing with others.

I am getting very weary with writing ; I must give over. Will my little Gypsie forget me ? No, never ! He cries bitterly at the thought of parting ; he has brought me a number of his toys, and books, and pets, more particularly his favourite rabbit, for me to take to Banton to 'play with and help to make me better.' My little Gypsie ! Mr. Farren's God protect and bless my Gypsie !

I wonder if I shall come back again ?

Will Life, so wonderfully strong, and Hope, so undying, and Endurance, so quenchless, assert their claim, and bring me back strong and well? It may be so; or, will the fevered pulse wear itself into everlasting calm, and the throbbing heart tire itself into final rest? I cannot tell. I have but one thing which links me to life, and for that, before I lay down my tired hand, again I pray—Mr. Farren's God protect and bless my Gypsie!

Banton, Wednesday, May 26.

Alone and very tired, but I have not felt so weary to-day. I suppose the novelty of the journey and Dr. Vanny's company helped me.

What is my little Gypsie doing now, I wonder? He has prayed for 'Sister Maude,' I know; and sleeping, perhaps he dreams of her! I long to see him; I am glad that I do; it tells me that all is not lost. Papa parted from me with such deep, genuine feeling, that I almost felt at the moment that it

was worth while being ill to see it in him ; it made me very happy in spite of feebleness.

We have come through a lovely country to-day. I almost felt once more as if through all my 'pulses throbbed the fulness of the spring.'

Dear Aunt Louise is so kind ! Her eyes filled with tears when she saw me, and I heard her say, as she kissed me, 'Maude's child !' I am glad that she loves me for Mamma's sake. I have often wished that Papa would let me come and see her, and then, perhaps, I might learn something about Mamma. I will ask Aunt Louise about her some day.

It is a beautiful house, with every appliance that taste and wealth can furnish, and every convenience for an invalid. I have not seen Uncle yet ; Aunt Louise said I was tired enough for to-day, so I must wait for that until to-morrow.

Thursday, June 17.

I have been here three weeks now. I do think I am a little better, though they will not

say I am. I can write more without feeling so very tired ; surely I must be a little better.

Yesterday, when Aunt Louise and I were sitting at the foot of one of the green banks in this most beautiful garden, Dr. Vanny appeared before us. We were astonished. He said he had come on business, but I am quite sure that was an excuse. I believe he came only to see me. He went away this afternoon, and declared he should report progress, and that I was getting on famously ; but all the time there was a queer look about his eyes which belied everything he said ; and when he went away, he took hold of my face, as a father might do that of a child, and holding it between his hands, and looking very earnestly into it, he said, 'You are a silly, obstinate, foolish child, Maude !' and then he kissed me, and went without another word.

Dr. Vanny has very rarely kissed me, although he often calls me his 'own child.' I believe the last time he did was when

Mamma died. I remember that night! He came into the room where I was crouching before the fire, and lifted me up, and took my face between both his hands, just as he did yesterday, and kissed it. I wonder what made poor, old, lonely Dr. Vanny kiss me yesterday? Aunt Louise did not look at all surprised; she only said, after he was gone, 'Poor Dr. Vanny!' I think she seemed to understand all about it. I mean to ask her some day before I leave, and perhaps she will tell me some particulars of Mamma's life, and how she knew Dr. Vanny, and if she does, I will put it down, only it tires me now to write much. I have written very little this year.

I like being here. I have a beautiful sitting-room to myself, when I wish to be alone. After seeing that I have everything I need, and that I lie down so many hours a day, and drive out with them, Aunt Louise leaves me at liberty to amuse myself. She has provided me with a maid—a kind,

elderly person, who is instructed to make me take certain things at certain hours, and get me all I am ordered to have. I am so glad Aunt Louise leaves me to myself. I saw she studied me well for about a week, and then, with true kindness, she just adopted this way of treating me.

I sit out of doors for hours ; it is so pleasant in this garden, but not like our own old garden at Stonecross, for the villa has not been built long, and the garden is quite modern. There are no old overshadowing trees, and lichen-covered stones, and green carpets of moss ; nor quaint, dim alleys, nor rookery. It is all new, fresh ; but still it is very beautiful—beautiful with the finish of art, not with the ripeness of age.

The town lies between me and the hills as I sit now—the villas built of the white stone, so plentiful in this part. At one end of the town are the public gardens, looking as new as everything else—except a grove of old beech trees, which, I suppose, were there

long before this modern town lifted up its plebeian head—and there is one spot in the gardens which I like. I can sit there without being seen, and watch the groups as they pass, all intent on their own concerns. Numbers of children with their nursemaids, and lovers in abundance. I wonder *they* should like to go to such a public place. I wonder they do not choose some of those shady walks through the distant woods, or away up the hills, or far into the country, where they could look and talk exactly as they felt. I wonder they like to have all that noise and bustle around them—that parade and show of fashion, and that brass band playing every piece of dance music which has been written the last twelve months. Then there is the public Promenade, the Pump-room, the Baths, the Crescent, and, a little to the right, the large Hospital and the new Hotel.

It is a pretty sight from here; the long winding white roads stretching up the hills from all the different parts of the town, with

every here and there a farm-house at their side. A little further on, that old square tower, and there, in the other direction, that new white staple, tell that the houses have clustered into a village. All the view is bounded by that high range of hills which clasp their arms right round the town, and girdle it fast in their embrace.

It is a pleasant town, though having that unfinished freshness which rather tires the eye and jars upon your sense of rest. The very shopkeepers have a raw, crude look, as if they were rather astonished at finding themselves where they are, and not quite sure how they came there. The public buildings look as if they had not known each other long, and could not yet say how they should like each other. The only old things are the 'everlasting hills;' and they will remain when this modern place shall have grown grey and hoary with age, and be crumbling away under the hard finger of Time. Yes; but the day will come—assure

thyself of this, my heart, take courage and be strong!—the day will come, when even these hills, standing now so green and beautiful, shall be shaken from their place and pass away for ever! And long before then, I shall be sleeping quietly in that old vault under the chancel floor in Stonecross church, where the Maynards have slumbered for many long years; and under the name on Mamma's monument shall be graven another—‘Madeleine Maynard, *Ætat* — what?’

Saturday, July 10.

A month since I wrote, and seven weeks since I came to Banton, and the day after tomorrow I am to return to Stonecross. Am I to go back just as I came—no worse, no better? I would rather, I think, feel the ravings and wrestlings of despair than this dead calm, this intense numbness. Better to burn with the hot fires of suffering than waste away in the still, calm stupor of unconsciousness.

Aunt Louise would like me to stay longer, but Papa will not hear of it. He says in his last letter that I have stayed long enough, there is a propriety in everything. 'Let all things be done decently and in order,' is the climax of his statements. He was coming for me last week, but an attack of the gout has laid him aside; he has had one or two attacks lately. I have begged to be allowed to travel alone. Dr. Vanny cannot leave home just now, and I very much disliked the idea of sending a servant for me. What would be the use of sending James or Walton all the way from Stonecross to travel with me back again? I do think that nobody but Aunt Gretta would have thought of such a thing. But then it is all her kindness and care for me; and though she is certain that if I go alone I shall be maimed, wounded, killed, or otherwise injured on those dreadful railways, I am to return on Monday.

— Papa says in his letter that Gypsie does not seem well, but they do not know that

anything particular is the matter with him; he has not seemed like himself the last fortnight. I am glad then for that, that I am going home.

I mean to ask Aunt Louise if she will tell me something about Mamma. She always comes into my bedroom at night to see if I have all I want, and she sometimes stays with me a little time if Uncle can spare her, so I will ask her then.

Sunday, July 11.

I did ask Aunt Louise to-night about Mamma, and in a very few words she told me her history. I had often suspected the truth. Dr. Vanny loved her, and she wanted to marry him. There was some mystery about his life—something connected with a brother who was very wild, and for whom Dr. Vanny had become bound, and whose debts proved to be enormous. He had to leave the country, and Dr. Vanny was unjustly suspected of being connected with his wrong-doing. He could not clear himself without

further inculpating this younger brother, and unless he would do it, Mamma's parents refused to let her marry him. They insisted that the engagement should be broken off, unless Dr. Vanny was cleared of all suspicion. It *was* broken off, and Aunt Louise says it broke Mamma's heart. After Dr. Vanny went away, they sent her from home for her health, and in the hope that she might forget about the matter, and while away she met with papa ; and when they urged her marriage with him very much, she said she did not care what she did, and consented, declaring at the same time that she had never loved anyone but Dr. Vanny, and never should.

Aunt Louise says that she did not see Mamma for a long time after her marriage, for it was then that Uncle's appointment at the Russian Court obliged him to leave England, and they were away many years. She says that she had hoped when Mamma was settled in her new home, and felt new claims upon her, she would forget the past and be-

come like herself again ; but when she saw her on her return from Russia, she found out that she had never forgotten the past, and never would. After Uncle's health had obliged him to give up his appointment, they went to live in Italy, and the south of France, and Aunt Louise did not see Mamma again until they returned to England for a time, and went over to Stonecross, and she then found that Dr. Vanny had settled in the neighbourhood. Aunt Louise had not seen him since the night before Mamma's wedding. How long that is since ! And yet to-night, as Aunt Louise told me about it, I felt her hot tears on my face.

Dr. Vanny must have come into our neighbourhood, she thinks, about a year before I was born, but she cannot be sure, for Mamma never mentioned him in her letters. Aunt Louise says that Papa knew nothing of this matter about Dr. Vanny, for the place where Mamma was visiting when he met her was a long way from her home, and she was

married at once from the friends' house where she was staying ; they were only engaged six weeks, and Mamma was but nineteen.

Aunt Louise says, she does not think Dr. Vanny's name ever crossed Mamma's lips after she was married. I daresay the reason Mamma's parents hastened the marriage so much, was because they thought she would forget all about the old love, then. Forget ? Oh, how could they think so ! Aunt Louise says she never knew any man love a woman as Dr. Vanny loved Mamma.

Aunt Louise told me all this only an hour ago, as the hills and woods were losing themselves in the dim twilight, and silence gathered over the earth, and the stars, one by one, began to look out upon us. When she had finished, she said, ' Now, Maude, I have told you what you wished so much to know. Be very kind, my child, to Dr. Vanny ; he loves you for your mother's sake. And, Maude,—Heaven grant that when love comes to you, it may bring you more happiness than it did

to her. God bless Maude's child ; ' and she kissed me and left me.

Oh, Auntie, Auntie ! only a little hour ago since you said those words ! ' When it comes ! ' It *has* come. ' More happiness ! ' And I cannot tell her. I cannot tell anyone ; I must bear it alone. There is no one to whom I may have the infinite relief of saying those little words, ' I love him.' Nay, I may not even say to my own poor, silly, weak heart, ' he loved me.' I may only dwell on my own folly, my own infatuation. This is the only thought left me. Not one little look or tone of love to treasure up, to hoard safely in memory's garner, and—

Aunt has been in and found me writing. She has insisted upon my putting my book away, and going to bed at once, so I must do so. To-morrow night I shall be back at Stonecross.

## CHAPTER XX.

Banton, Monday, July 19.

ONLY a week since I wrote ! Nay, it is a life-time !

I do not know what I am writing. I think I scarcely know what I am, or where I am. The last three nights, when I have come into my room, I have tried to sit down and steady my hand to write all that has happened ; but I could not. I could do nothing but be very still, and weep quiet tears of happiness.

I am very happy ! ' I love you, Maude ; I have always loved you, little Maude.' Little Maude ! He called me that just now, when he left me at the garden gate ; nothing else—but just ' little Maude.' And it is not often he says even that. I am glad that he

is so quiet, so deep in his love. His love ! How strange it seems to write this, to know it, to feel it ! I am satisfied. I ask nothing in Heaven or Earth but what I have now—Edgar's love.

He does not feel like I do, I know ; but that does not trouble me for a moment. He will by-and-by, when it is all made clear ; and it soon will be all made clear. I have no fear of that. It would never be given me to enter Heaven only to have the gates closed upon me and shut me out for ever ! No, hopeless as my nature is, I do not believe *that* for one moment. But I am not hopeless now ; I am a changed creature.

I do not care that Edgar looks grave and *very* serious, and says, in that low, deep tone, 'Take care, Maude ; we may—we most likely shall—be separated yet. Do not build upon the present ; it is only for one week, and then it may all come to an end. I doubt whether it is right for me to be here even for this one week.'

He will believe and say that papa will never give his consent. Never! that is a long day. If there be hope or pity or love upon earth, he will! I know he will! I will weep, I will pray. I will tell how Edgar risked his own life and saved Gypsie's. I will implore him, for the sake of my dead mother, to be good to me. Papa will listen; he must! There is not the heart in any human being, much less a father's, which could turn away from a child who asks such a thing. It is only a question of money and position; and of money, I have plenty in my own right. Surely, ten thousand pounds will be enough for us to live upon. We shall want so very little, because I would much rather work for Edgar myself than hire servants to do it. And we will live quite away from Stonecross, so that papa and Charlotte and all of them will never be in the least annoyed by us. We will never go near the place.

If only Edgar would see this as I do! Papa will never refuse—he cannot! He will

yield to our prayers, our entreaties, our love ! If—if there could be such a thing as that he should *not* ; if—but that is impossible. Edgar says it is *not* impossible. Then—I only know one thing—I shall still be Edgar's wife. *That* is certain, come what will !

Let me tell how it has all come about. I can scarcely realise yet that it is truth, that Edgar is—no, I will not write one word except to relate facts as they occurred. I might go on for ever if I began to write all the happy thoughts which make my eyes fill and unsteady my hand

I see by the date that it is just a week since I sat by the window to write, as I am sitting now. Just a week since Aunt Louise said to me, 'Never did a man love a woman as dearly as Dr. Vanny loved your mamma, Maude.' I think differently, Auntie, dear Auntie !

I started on my journey the next day. Uncle and Aunt drove to the station, and Auntie saw me comfortably ensconced in a

nice first-class carriage. Jarvis saw that my boxes were put exactly in the right place, and then gave the guard (by uncle's desire, poor Jarvis was not the sinner) some money to look after me. Thus, having taken every precaution against all dangers, ghostly and bodily, which might befall me on my way (of much avail were the precautions), dear Aunt Louise bade me a tearful 'Good-bye,' saying, 'I wish, my darling, you had gone home looking better,' and I started.

I was not tearful; I was not sad. I felt nothing—everything was the same to me. I was returning to Stonecross—and how? Neither better nor worse. I was going back to live on for years and years, and—With a resolute effort at self-restraint, I determined that I would not let my thoughts dwell upon it. I would look at everything we passed; I would listen to every word that was spoken in the carriage; I would examine everything my neighbours wore; nay, I would take notes of every word they uttered, and sketch

in my pocket-book their figures and faces—anything rather than let my thoughts revert to the past, dwell upon the present, or go forward to the future. So I turned to look at my *compagnons de voyage*.

I had three—two ladies and a gentleman. Ladies ! well I dare say they were ladies in the true sense of the term. They were, I suppose, the wives of men who had made money, and, as people express it, 'risen in the world.' Oppressive though the weather was, they wore bright-coloured, rich silks, velvet mantles, and feathery and flowery bonnets. They did not appear to be related ; probably they had known each other during their stay in Banton ; I gathered as much from their conversation. Banton is full of such people ; they like the place because it is considered 'genteel,' 'the thing,' and they come here to spend the money so hardly earned at home, and to make the display of dress and appearance which would probably be lost on their neighbours, who know all

their antecedents. Kindly, good souls ! looking much nicer, I have no doubt, in their print gowns and checked aprons, seeing after dairies and kitchens at home, and far more at their ease, than passing the morning in the public gardens, or lounging in the Colonnade at Banton, or dining at seven o'clock in the grand *salle à manger* of a fashionable hotel. However, I believe they thought they had enjoyed it very much, and were persuaded they felt quite at home there, and they will doubtless come again next year, and undergo another month's penance, for the sake of saying, 'We always spend at least a month of the year at Banton ; it is such a delightful place, you know, and the ways there just suit us !' I could learn from what they said that their husbands had left some time before. I believe men, on the whole, are much more sincere than women. These husbands could not deceive themselves for a month into the belief that they were quite at home and very happy in Banton, knowing all

the time that their hands were aching and their souls were weary to be back at their shop or their farm.

My other companion was a different sort of person. He was, I fancy, an old bachelor — a man of position and inherited wealth ; no *parvenu*, or self-made man ; but, for all that, he was crochety, testy, and irritable. Shame on me ! there were two facts connected with him enough to make any living man ill-tempered. He was a bachelor, and he had rheumatism. I learnt the first fact from his own grunted statements ; the second was apparent to the most casual observer. He had been staying at the — three months, and appeared to be considerably better for the stay. I wonder he did not come away in a more grateful frame of mind. Poor, crusty old fellow ! But he was not old either, and perhaps underneath he was all the richer and sweeter for a thick outside coating of crust — like a bottle of old port that has lain by to mellow. Now and then he opened his lips

to grunt out some remark, or suggest some improvement either affecting the windows or the seats or the cushions. He wore a coat and waistcoat of sealskin, and had an unlimited supply of furs and rugs; also a hot-water bottle for his feet, which at every convenient stoppage his footman came from another carriage to refill.

This gentleman talked very little, but the other two kept up an incessant chit-chat; they seemed to have material enough to keep them employed for a journey at least ten times the length of our not inconsiderable one. Banton, and all its surroundings and containings; the hotel, and all its arrangements; the company, the servants, the dinners, the dress, the *affaires de cœur*, the baths; what they had done, where they had been, whom they had seen, what they had worn, and what their respective bills came to, and how much money, on a fair calculation, they had managed to get through during the month; but this last point was discussed with

such energy that at last they mutually agreed to leave it unsettled, each lady claiming the precedence.

I hope they took me for a lady's-maid; I think they did, for I saw their eyes closely examining my white straw hat and Holland suit, and then they took no more notice of me, but kindly left me to look on and listen, and watch the country through which we were passing.

A most beautiful country it was, though I do not think that I noticed it very particularly. Great masses of gigantic rock towering up to the skies and streaked with tiny waterfalls like veins of silver; then sudden glimpses of lovely rural scenes—soft undulating hills, meadows rich and fruitful, and corn-fields whitening to the harvest. One of the things which I noticed, after we had gone some way, was the great number of tunnels through which we passed; some so short, they seemed only passages to scenes of exquisite loveliness upon which they opened;

others so long, you seemed to have been half-an-hour in the dark instead of three minutes ; and they followed each other in such rapid succession, you had hardly time to look round you before you were again in obscurity.

And here my hand begins to tremble and my heart to grow sick with the remembrance of that journey, every incident of which is so distinctly before me.

I remember now how curiously it struck me, and with what a strange sense of the ludicrous the effect which the frequent recurrence of these tunnels had upon one of my talkative neighbours. After we had been through one or two, both of the ladies began to talk about railway accidents, in the recital of which they displayed as much vehemence, if not as much accuracy, as they did in talking about their experiences during the past month. One of them, the elder of the two, seemed to be singularly affected by going through the tunnels, and affected in a manner

not particularly reassuring to her fellow-travellers. As soon as a lowering shadow and a mass of rock denoted a tunnel, she broke off from any subject about which she might, at the moment, be talking ; her face assumed the most lugubrious expression, and, seizing hold of the hand of her friend opposite, she commenced a peculiar swaying movement of her body to and fro, and began quoting hymns. I suppose they must have been hymns, or rather odd lines from hymns ; but, by some coincidence, they were none of them of a nature particularly cheering to the feelings. Thank Heaven, I am not nervous, or I cannot say what the effect might have been upon me ! What the effect was upon the gentleman in the corner, I could only guess by hearing occasional grunts from under cover of the seal-skin cap, and seeing severe looks cast at the reciter when light again transiently dawned.

What a hymnal that good lady must have possessed ! I wonder what church she at-

tended. I must say I should not have liked to have been her pastor and bound in duty to listen to her 'experience.' It must have had a depressing effect, judging from her choice of hymns on this occasion. I remember the quotations I was struck with, for I jotted some of them down, at the time, in my pocket-book. She was in the middle of a description of a dish, which had been served up one day at dinner during her stay at the hotel. 'And you know, my dear ma'am,' she was saying, 'you know, my dear ma'am, to send up a dish like that and give it a French name to try to make people think it was something grand! I should have been ashamed, I should indeed, my dear ma'am, I should have been ashamed to put such a dish on my servant's dinner-table; indeed, my Betsy (I give her fourteen pound a year and her beer), she would not have looked at it.'

'No, indeed,' responded her *vis-à-vis*; 'but I wonder that such a dish as that should

have been sent up at the —— Hotel ; perhaps you had a great many people there who did not know what's what. Now, where I stayed, I assure you, there was nothing but cooking of the first order. I know something about cooking, and my master said to me—he said—"This beats you hollow, Mary."

At this moment a visible darkening of the atmosphere and a shrill shriek of the engine gave notice that we were about to enter a tunnel. My neighbour bent her body slightly forward, and, seizing hold of her friend's hand, began, in a tone, befitting a High Churchman reading the prayers for the dying—a half chanting, half-intoning monotone—

'And am I only born to die—i—i,  
And must I suddenly comply—i—i,  
With Nature's stern decree—e—e. With Na-  
ture's stern decree—e—e.'

By dint of prolonging the last syllable in each line to the extent of her breath, and repeating in a still more dreary manner the last

line, we had generally emerged into broad daylight by the time that the good lady had finished the third or fourth line of her quotation ; then she immediately relinquished the hand she had taken, ceased the oscillating movement of her body, allowed her face to assume its natural rotundity, and, gathering up the thread of her narrative exactly at the point she had broken off, she went on with renewed energy—‘ and as I was saying, ma’am, it was disgraceful to have such a dish served up at any hotel, calling itself an hotel ; I am sure the pan they cooked it in had never been washed out ; them pans want to stand half-an-hour at least with boiling water and soda in, and then washed out with cold water two or three times, and wiped quite dry with a clean tea-towel. I always see to the cleaning of them pans myself, for though my Betsy is such a cook (I give her fourteen pound a year and her beer, ma’am)—though she is such a cook——’ Here another shrill shriek gave notice, and by the time we were fairly in the

dark, I heard the deep minor wail, which seemed unpleasantly close to my ear—

‘To damp our earthly joy—oy—oys,  
To increase our gracious fe—e—ears,  
For ever let th’ archangel’s vo—oi—oice  
Be sounding in our ea—ea—ears. Be sounding  
in our ea—ea—ears.’

Light again, and again the recital of the saucepan and the offending dish—‘I give her, as I told you, fourteen pound a year, ma’am, and her beer, and for all that she won’t, say what I will to her, she won’t see after the cleaning of them saucepans at all—my Betsy won’t. So thinks I to myself the best and shortest way with her is to do it myself ; and I find it answer uncommon well ; nothing like seeing after things yourself, ma’am, as I dare say you’ve found out, though perhaps you don’t give your cook fourteen pound a year, ma’am, and her beer.’

‘I don’t keep a cook,’ responded the other ; ‘and a vast deal easier I find it to get on without one.’

‘Dear me !’ was the reply ; ‘but don’t you

find it very awkward now not to have a cook? Why, my Betsy, I give her——' a shadow, a shrill scream, darkness, and then the low dirge—

‘And must my trembling spirit fly—i—i  
Into a world unknow—ow—own,  
A land of deepest sha—a—ade  
Unpierced by human tho—ou—ought,  
The dreary regions of the de—ea—ead  
Where all things are for—go—o—ot.’

That was a long tunnel, and, after all, I don't think my nerves are made of iron. By this time I really did begin to feel rather queer. It seemed to me that no woman would relieve her mind in a manner so peculiarly uncomfortable to her fellow-passengers unless she had some well-grounded expectation that we were all on the road to instant destruction. I could not express my feeling by muttered expletives like those I occasionally heard issuing from under cover of the seal-skin cap. Nothing remained for me but to creep further in my corner, and be hot and cold by turns, as I tried to face the probabilities which seemed so astonishingly

present to the mind of my neighbour. She went on—‘fourteen pound a year and her beer, ma’am. She’s a wonderful cook, is my Betsy, although she don’t clean them sauce-pans. Why, my dear ma’am, no wonder *you* enjoy a month at Banton ! You must have an amazing amount of work to do yourself. Not to keep a cook ! Now, if I were you——’ Another tunnel ; they came faster and faster now, but happily shorter and shorter—

‘Our wasting lives grow shorter sti—i—ill,  
What dying worms we be, we be—e—e.’

‘now, if I were you, I really would not, I would not’—darkness again——

‘No, dear companion, no—o—o  
We gladly let thee go—o—o.’

This time she seemed growing rather personal in her quotations, and, as light again dawned, I looked to see the effect these last lines had had upon the other. They did not seem to have produced any effect at all ; she quietly relinquished the hand which had grasped hers, and resumed her listening attitude while the other went on—‘knock

yourself up in the way that you must do ; you know *you* need not give your cook fourteen pound a year and her beer ; you can get one for a vast deal less.' Darkness again, and again a dirge—

‘ I too shall gather up my fee—e—eet,  
Shall soon resign this fleeting bre—ea—eath ;  
this fleeting bre—ea—th.’

‘ But there you’re wrong,’ interrupted her companion eagerly, the moment we emerged into light, ‘ for I don’t do more work than——’

I closed my eyes, and turned my face resolutely away towards the window by which I was sitting. I would listen no more ; why had I listened at all ? but, then, if I did not, my thoughts would—yes, they would—I could not control them, and it was better for me to dwell upon all these women said than upon—and at that moment there came—can I describe it ?

I do not know that I can, and yet it is all before me now—vivid, clear, actual, real ;—there came the usual shriek—dimness—dark-

ness—only another tunnel, and not a long one I hoped, when—there was a plunge—a second's pause—an oscillation—a trembling—some cries of terror—there was a shock as if the ground clave under our feet—the two female voices shrieked in wild chorus—a deep oath rang through the carriage—I seemed to be rolling about—I felt as if a strong hand seized and shook me roughly—I came in contact with I knew not what—I was violently thrown down—and I knew that there was a railway accident, and knew no more.

My first sensation was of a weight like a mountain of lead upon me.

Then I heard, as it were, the wild surging cries of a multitude.

Then I tried to move myself, but could not; my body was pinned down; my hands were fastened; not one ray of light shone through the black darkness; wild cries and groans of anguish rang in my ears; and so horrible did they sound that it needed no

excited imagination at that moment to believe that they came from the bottomless pit ; while, above all, there rose a deep bellow as of a thousand wild bulls let loose, and a hissing as if the very flames of hell crackled and glared around us.

And now, a lurid, fiery glare shot across the dense darkness, but to leave it blacker than before ; it came again and again, and lighted up where I lay. I shut my eyes with a thrill of horror, not daring to see what that light might reveal ; and yet it seemed to me that with my eyelids tightly shut that glare pierced through and through, and danced its lurid ghastly beams ever before me. I could not shut my ears, and still there wailed and surged that wild confusion of anguished cries.

I lay still. I ceased to try to move. I think I was quite calm. I gradually lost consciousness to everything but one thought—death was coming at last—had come—was touching me now ! I was not afraid. One quick, tumultuous thought of Gypsie—one

smothered sigh for my darling, and it seemed to me at that moment that I heard again those words of Mr. Farren's—'God will take care of Gypsie,' and I ceased to think about him. One thought of my home, and that thought was, 'they will never find fault with me now !' And then—then—I saw *him* once again ; just as I had seen him last ; the grave look, the quiet wistfulness, the utter calmness ! One choked sob came from my lips—'God bless my love ;' and I must have lost consciousness again, for all seemed to pass away, and I remember no more.

. . . . .

There was a light—a sound—a confusion. I tried to raise my head; but I could not. A sharp pain shot through it, and I gave over trying. I was only conscious of one thing—that noise ; those surging groans, that moaning wail ! Oh God ! if only that might cease ! If only I might not hear that ! If only I could be conscious of some other sensation, hear something besides that sobbing tumult, and

ever and again a wild shriek above it all, which seemed to me like the cry of a lost spirit! Oh, for some other sound; something else to listen to! not that; always that and nothing else!

‘Maude, Maude!’

It shot through every sentient power! it thrilled each passive sense! it quickened every dying pulse into life and fulness.

‘Maude, Maude! Merciful Father, one little hour to let her know I loved her!’ and all was still.

‘Maude, my Maude! mine in death if not in life!’

I heard it. No other sound now. No sobbing wail; no anguished cry; no piercing shriek. Only those murmured words, and nothing more! Sweet as a whisper breathed from Heaven it came!

What was it? Where, who? It mattered not—for I knew without seeing that it was Mr. Farren who bent over me.

. . . . .

Edgar says that I was unconscious all the time. I was not. It seems to me that after this I was always conscious—conscious of one thing.

I am told that I was removed and taken into the nearest house at hand ; the nearest, to be out of the way as much as possible of those dreadful sounds. There, after a careful examination, I was pronounced to have sustained no ascertainable injury beyond extreme fright and a severe shaking ; that a strong sleeping draught was given me, and I slept soundly for four hours. I remember light and strange faces around me—indistinctly and as if in a dream, and something being given me to drink. But of one thing, I was distinctly, fully conscious, and I needed nothing more.

The next thing which I remember was a strange kind of awaking, and before I could tell where I was, I felt soft, warm kisses on my forehead, cheeks, lips ; and when I opened my eyes, I saw Aunt Louise bending over me.

‘ Oh Maude! my dear child! Thank God you are safe ! ’

‘ Where am I, Aunt Louise ? ’

‘ At a kind lady’s house. Oh, my dear child, you might have been killed! What a mercy! How do you feel ? ’

I was wide awake now. I had begun to feel—to feel what ? I knew. It all came back to me—that voice, those words, that touch ! I raised myself up in bed, and I think the colour must have come into my face, for Aunt Louise exclaimed,

‘ Why, my dear child, how you look ! I really believe a day’s rest will put you all right. Oh Maude ! thank God your life is spared ! ’

‘ Amen ! ’ I said, solemnly and reverently. ‘ I thank God my life is spared ! ’ and there fell a silence between us.

It might have lasted one minute, two, three, five, ten—an hour, I cannot tell ; I took no note of time, and Aunt Louise spoke again.

‘Your poor, dear father, Maude! But he will know now that you are safe. I telegraphed the moment I came and had seen you.’

I tried to rouse myself to think. ‘How good of you to come, Aunt Louise! How did you know about it?’

‘The telegram arrived at Banton directly after the accident, and I came up with the doctors and some others in the special train.’

‘And you left Uncle?’ I said.

‘Oh, my dear child, do not think of that! Only let us be thankful that you are safe, and have no injury; at least, I trust it is so; you will get over the fright and shaking by and by.’

‘I have got over it now,’ I said. ‘Aunt Louise, was it a very bad accident?’

‘Hush, my dear! We will talk about it another time.’

I lay still, and thought; and Aunt Louise stroked my face with her own gentle hand, and kissed me again and again.

‘Aunt Louise, what o’clock is it?’

‘Nearly five; you have been sleeping four hours.’

‘Could we get to Banton to-night?’

‘If you think you could do without me, Maude, I should like to go, and I will return the first thing to-morrow. Your Uncle will be so very anxious that I fear the effect it may have on him.’

‘I will go with you,’ I said, and I began to get up as I spoke; ‘there is no reason why I should not; I am quite well.’

‘But, Maude, what are you thinking of?’ cried Aunt Louise. ‘You must not, indeed you must not, attempt to get up yet.’

‘Dear Aunt Louise! please let me. I should not like to remain here in a stranger’s house. How long shall we be in going back?’

‘Only an hour; I was less than that in coming, but it was a special train and the line cleared; but I will not let you attempt it, Maude, without a doctor’s opinion.’

‘Then will you please let me see one as

soon as possible, for I should like to get away from here ;' and for the first time since I had heard *his* voice the remembrance of that wailing chorus of human agony made me shudder.

Aunt Louise saw it. ' Poor child, poor child !' she said ; ' lie down again, Maude, for a few minutes while I speak to a doctor ;' and I obeyed.

The result of the doctor's visit was that if I felt myself equal to the short journey, and he saw no reason for supposing that I was not, I might go any time ; the sooner I was away from the scenes and associations of the accident the better.

And so Aunt Louise dressed me, and rejoiced every moment that no bones were broken or joints dislocated or bruises visible. And then, she made me swallow something and lie on a sofa whilst she went to speak to the lady of the house who had been so kind.

The train by which we and several of the uninjured passengers were to return to Banton

was to leave the place of the accident at half-past six, and it wanted a quarter of an hour to that time when Aunt Louise re-entered the room and found me all dressed and ready.

‘Why, Maude! quite ready?’ she said, ‘and though very pale, looking almost like yourself! Thank God for it!’

‘Amen,’ again I said, solemnly and reverently, ‘thank God for it!’

We were quite ready in five minutes, and then Aunt Louise gathered up what belonged to us and put all in readiness, and we were just leaving the room, when she said, ‘By the way, Maude, there is a gentleman who has been asking after you particularly. He was in the train, but unhurt. They tell me it was he who brought you in here. I have heard no particulars, and I do not want you to begin to think about it yet, though I thought you might like to thank him yourself, if he has rendered you any service; but perhaps you had better not see him, for your nerves must have had such a dreadful shock. I will ask

him to give us his address, for your papa will wish to have it, if we are at all indebted to him.'

'I should like to see him,' I said, very quietly, 'I should like to see him and thank him a moment alone, Aunt Louise.'

At any other time perhaps it might have occurred to Aunt Louise, that there could be no reason why I should not thank a stranger before her as well as alone; but at a time like that which we were just passing through, one does not stay to think about proprieties and reasons. Thankfulness was the one feeling then Aunt Louise was experiencing, and she accepted my proposal without the least demur.

'You shall, dear,' she said, 'poor child, what a shock it must have been! Come this way into the drawing-room, Maude; and I will see where he is,' and I went into the drawing-room.

It could only have been two minutes before Mr. Farren and I stood face to face.

All he said was, and he said it very quietly, 'I trust you are better, Miss Maynard.'

But I took no notice. 'Maude, Maude! Merciful Father! only one little hour to let her know that I loved her!' 'Maude, Maude! mine in death if not in life!' I had not been unconscious. There was no mistake. I had heard the words, and nothing but Death should rob me of the remembrance.

I went up to him, and put out both my hands.—'Mr. Farren, do you love me?'

A great flush came over his face, dyeing it crimson, and then leaving it, cold, stern, white, with firmly-shut lips and knitted brow.

He turned from me and put his hands upon the mantel-shelf, and leant upon it.

I followed him. I laid my hand lightly upon his arm. 'Do you love me, Mr. Farren?'

'I have loved you long, Maude.'

'Then I will be your wife.'

## CHAPTER XXI.

Tuesday, July 20.

WHERE did I leave off? I remember, I laid my pen down yesterday, and began to think, and before I had finished thinking, I had to go into the garden to meet Edgar. But we did not stay there. I remember, how often I have wondered that people could walk up and down there. I mean people who—were like Edgar and me. I don't mean *like* us—but in the same circumstances. I am sure there is no one like Edgar, and I hope there is no one like me, though I do think I am growing more gentle and kind; indeed, it seems very easy to be so now, for I am so happy! I will never think again of the past—only of the present and the future.

What a happy present and what a bright future mine is ! And I was near death ! In that terrible accident, there were seven killed and many wounded. I don't think I have ever put down anything connected about it ; it is so dreadful to think of ! What a strange thing that Edgar should be travelling by the same train, and never knew I was in it, until he came with others to render what help he could, and I was taken out of the carriage insensible. He says when he first saw me, he thought that I was dead, and it was a long time before there was any sign of returning life. It was when becoming conscious, I heard the words he said. He does not remember saying them ; it was the pain of the moment, which made him forget everything else.

And now, if I would let him, he would leave me, and not see me again until he has seen papa. But I will not let him ! I will not give up my happiness ! Be it right or wrong, I cannot. And it is not wrong ; he is

mine ; he loves, he has always loved me. That is enough.

Edgar says that one of the ladies in the carriage had been thrown upon me by the concussion. She was very much injured ; it was thought she would not live. I do not think Edgar likes to talk about it. He has very briefly told me how the accident occurred. Going up a steep and long incline, the coupling-chains of two of the carriages of a luggage train broke at the end of a tunnel, and the carriages dashed with gathered speed into our train, which was rapidly making the tunnel. Edgar just told me the circumstances, and now he will not revert to them. I have seen his eyes fill with tears when I have spoken about it, and he has drawn me close to him, only saying, 'Thank God for sparing my little Maude !'

The gentleman in the carriage was almost unhurt ; the other lady had her arm broken. Perhaps it is a good thing that I am so slight and thin, or I might have been much more

hurt. But I am not thin now ! I am growing stouter and stronger every day. And Aunt Louise cannot understand how it is that I am so changed !

Aunt Louise telegraphed to papa to say that I had returned with her to Banton ; and very late that night, he and Dr. Vanny arrived. Dr. Vanny only made fun of me, but I saw that it was only to hide a deeper feeling ; and papa was all kindness, all anxiety, for an hour or so, as unlike himself as he could possibly be ; and then—it struck me as something almost ludicrous—when he began to subside, and really found that I was alive and likely to live, in fact, not hurt in any way, his old manner returned as naturally as possible, and he seemed a little at a loss as to what he ought to disapprove of. Certainly, I was not to blame for the accident. Perhaps I ought to have gone by another train ; no—he could not say that either, for he had fixed the train himself, when the gout prevented him coming for me. Well, it was very pleasant for papa

to be so pleased at first ; and if he had not been, it would have made no difference to me then. 'Maude, my Maude !' All through the evening—with every passing hour, far into the night, clear and distinct in my dreams, with the first waking thought, I heard the words ! Yes, I was his. By reason of his great love and mine, I was all his, entirely his, and for ever. We were one.

And Aunt Gretta ? Dr. Vanny declares that she is making arrangements to send a coach and post horses to bring me home, as she says that I shall never travel in one of those dreadful trains again ; and she declares that as long as she lives, she will never put her foot inside a railway carriage ; but then it is Dr. Vanny who tells me this, and he always makes fun of Aunt Gretta.

Papa and Dr. Vanny left the next day. When Dr. Vanny had quite made up his mind that there was nothing the matter with me, beyond my nerves being shaken, papa agreed to our united request, that I might be

left another fortnight at Banton, to have complete rest before travelling again, and Dr. Vanny would himself come for me at the end of that time.

I had told Aunt Louise as we came back to Banton that the gentleman who had asked after me, had only been helping as all did who were capable, and we were not indebted to him for any particular service ; so happily she thought no more about it, and he was only mentioned in conjunction with others when the accident was talked about. I was so thankful that Aunt Louise did not chance to ask me his name. Of course, when I come to think about it, it was not likely she would, for she could never imagine that I should happen to know the name of anyone who was in the train, or that knowing, I should not mention it.

I made Mr. Farren give me his address before I left him, because I hoped I might stay a little longer in Banton, and, if so, I wanted him to come to me there. When

papa and Dr. Vanny had gone, I wrote to him, and so it is that I have had one such happy week, and have one other before me. I am to leave next Wednesday week ; *then*—then ; no, I will not think of it ; Edgar does that enough for both of us. I will only live in the present.

I get up now, and have long walks before breakfast. How beautiful these summer mornings are ! Edgar and I walked five miles yesterday. I cannot tell how fresh and glowing and bright it was, with the dew untouched on the grass, and the flower scarcely open to the sun, and the lark singing 'high at heaven's gate,' and the bright beams making the sky and earth all aglow. I believe Edgar thinks that I am too happy, and he never sees me so but he tries to check me. I don't think he ought ; I should say it really is unkind, only he cannot be unkind. And now I shall write no more, for I want to be up early to-morrow ; we are going a long walk over the hills.

Wednesday, July 28.

We have parted—Edgar and I. I shall not see him again until he come to Stonecross to see papa.

I shall not put down any of the long talks which we have had. They are all so fresh and clear in my memory that I need not write them.

Edgar has not had any situation since he left Stonecross. He has not settled down anywhere, and twice he has been over to Stonecross, and I never knew. He stayed in the neighbourhood, and walked over to Stonecross after it was dark. Both times he came across the churchyard into the Hall gardens, and once he saw me. He said it was ten o'clock, and he had watched all the lights disappear, and then mine went out, and I opened the window and stood looking out. I have such a habit of doing this, that I cannot remember that night particularly. He watched me until I closed the window, and

then he says—no, I will not say what he says.

But he is not going to remain idle. He was going about a situation which he had been offered when the accident happened to the train he was in. It is a situation as one of the masters in the Mannerton Grammar School. I should like Edgar to take it at once. I want him to get something to do ; I think it will be so much better for him. I have seen the letters from the Head Master ; he is anxious to have Edgar, and it is a long way from Stonecross—quite in the north of England. Surely, they could not be very angry with me, even if I were not married quite as they wish, if I were so far away from them all. But Edgar will not enter into any engagement just now ; he says he must see how matters turn out first. I know what he means by that.

When we were out to-night he said, ‘ You are going back to Stonecross to-morrow, Maude.’

‘I know that,’ I said.

‘But you don’t think about it,’ he said ; ‘and that is not wise ; you are just living in the present.’

‘Very well,’ I said ; ‘then I will leave the present and go to the future, and think about the time when I shall be your wife.’

Such a light came into his face !

‘That may never be,’ he said ; ‘I never let myself dwell upon it, because I fear, I know, it is an impossibility. Oh Maude, Maude ! perhaps I may live to wish I had never seen you.’

‘Then you will live to be much older than I ever shall,’ I said ; ‘for however old I was, I should never wish that.’

‘Foolish child,’ he said ; ‘do you believe it possible that Dr. Maynard will ever say, “Mr. Farren, Maude shall be your wife ?”’

‘I do not care what he says,’ I said ; ‘I only know one thing, that I *will* be your wife, whether he says it or not.’

That quiet, grave look came into Edgar’s

face—that look I do not like to see ; it always awes me in an indescribable manner, and his voice took that deep tone which I know so well.

‘ Child,’ he said, ‘ we must do right, come what may ; and if your father says he will not give you to me, then——’ he stopped.

‘ Go on,’ I said ; ‘ what then ?’

‘ Then we must part. Oh Maude ! it had been infinitely better that we had never loved one another.’

‘ Well,’ I said, ‘ that is as you think ; I don’t think so ; but I dare say it is very stupid of me and very sensible of you.’

‘ We must not do wrong, Maude,’ he said.

‘ Who wishes to do wrong ?’ I said. ‘ I do not ; I want to do right. I want to marry the man I love, that is all. There is nothing wrong in that.’

‘ There may be,’ he said.

‘ Then I shall do wrong,’ I rejoined.

I dare say I ought not to have said so, but I could not help it. Had not a fortnight’s

experience taught me what I was to him, I should not have made such replies ; but feeling perfectly sure how the matter really stood, I was determined not to give way to his fancies. I would be brave and strong. Had he not taught me to be so, and was I going to fail now when he needed all the help I could give him ? He was so desponding, so hopeless, so different to what he had been at Stonecross. He went on—

‘ No, Maude, you will not do wrong. Even if all were straight before us, should I be doing right to make you a poor man’s wife ? ’

‘ In the first place,’ I said, ‘ you would not make me one ; I should make myself one ; and in the second place, I should *not* be a poor man’s wife ; we could not be very poor with my fortune from Mamma, in addition to your income.’

I ought not to have said that. In an instant his face clouded all over, and the warm flush came to his cheek ; he drew himself proudly up—

‘No,’ he said; I am not the man to live on my wife’s money; if I cannot maintain her I will not have her.’

His look made me very serious, and I said—

‘I think, Edgar, you take a wrong view of this matter; you look at it hopelessly; I look at it hopefully.’

‘Because I have all at stake, and I dare not hope to realise it; for, Maude, you are all to me. If I lose you I lose everything. I shall not win—the distance is too great between us; even my love, deep and strong as it is, cannot bridge it over. And, Maude, I love you with such a true love, the very best and holiest, the truest and deepest of all that a man has to give. I am not blind to your faults; I am not an idiot, wilfully deceiving myself. I would be so faithful, and yet so loving. I would take such care of you; not a sorrow, or a tear, or a thought of sadness should ever come near my darling if a true heart or a brave arm could keep them from

her. What I could be, what I would be to you, Maude, I know; what you are to me, I cannot tell you; what it would be to work for you, to live for you, to have you for my wife, God knows. And yet, feeling all this, —I say it seriously and firmly—I believe we shall have to part.'

'We will not!' I said. 'Earth and Hell shall not divide us, and Heaven, I know, never will.'

'Hush, hush!' he said, tenderly; 'there are nobler and better things in the world than to have our own way. God's way is best, and to submit to that is what we must do.'

'Edgar,' I said, 'you do not love me as I do you, or you would never talk in that way.'

I shall not forget the look he gave me, or his voice when he spoke to me, after a few minutes' pause.

'I know,' he said, 'that you do not mean what you have said, Maude.'

'I do not,' I said; 'I am petulant and

cross ; forgive me. Do you think I would act as I am now doing, and say what I have said if I did not trust you perfectly ?'

'I know you would not,' he said. 'Maude, the trial of losing you would be nothing to the possibility of your ceasing to love me. But I know you will never do this ; I believe it firmly and truly.'

'And you will always believe it, Edgar ? You will never doubt me for one moment ?'

'Never !' he said. 'I would sooner doubt my own existence than I would your faithfulness.'

'Then, Edgar,' I said, 'do one thing—nay, two things, for me.'

'What are they ?' he said, smiling.

'The first is, take that situation which you had been to see about when—when—you know, that accident happened.'

'And why do you wish this, Maude ?'

'Because I think it will be much better for you when you have something to do ; you will not feel so despondingly ; it makes me

very unhappy to see you so hopeless about the future.'

'What a practical, common-sense little woman Maude has become all at once,' he said.

'Now you are laughing at me, Edgar; but for all that I shall go on.'

'Go on for ever,' he said; 'I promise to listen.'

'I won't try you,' I said, 'for I don't believe you would, though you say so.'

'What has changed you so much, Maude?' he said.

'Your love, Edgar. Life is changed; all is changed. I am no longer saddened, defeated, crushed. I am a woman now—happy, hopeful, self-reliant, brave, Edgar; your love has done all this; you have made me so.'

And for reply he drew me closer and closer to him.

'There is one other thing, Edgar,' I said in a minute or two, 'will you do it?'

'If it be in the power of man!'

‘Wherever you go, or whatever happens, you will let me know where you are. Promise me this.’

He looked very grave. ‘I would rather you did not ask me this, Maude.’

‘But I must ask it, and I must have your promise. Give it to me now, Edgar; you said you would, if it were in the power of man.’

‘But it may happen, Maude, that it would be better both for you and for me that I should not give you this promise.’

‘It cannot be that, Edgar,’ I said, ‘and you must promise it me. I shall be gone to-morrow.’

‘But I shall see you again, Maude. When you have been at home a week at the longest—just to get settled—then I shall come to Stonecross and see Dr. Maynard.’

I shuddered. For the first time I seemed to realise then how matters really stood. But I conquered myself. I would not, if I could

help, let him see how, in spite of my brave front, I dreaded that visit.

‘Promise me what I ask you, Edgar.’

‘I would rather not, Maude.’

‘But I must have it! Before you leave me you must give me your word that whatever may happen or wherever you go, by some means you will let me know where you are.’ And I stood still and waited until Edgar gave me the promise I claimed.

I had to wait a long time, and ask again—not without tears; but he did it at last.

I asked this because I had a strange dread that if papa were very angry, Edgar might resolve to leave me entirely, and not give me the chance of judging for myself. He might think it the only honourable thing to do, and I dreaded, above everything, his acting upon a resolution founded on his notions of honour and upheld by his pride. For Edgar was proud. I had known that since the first time I had seen him. I was quite satisfied now he had given me his word, for I knew that

he would never be false to a promise; the same sense of honour which would have led him to do what I dreaded, would prevent him from breaking his word in the smallest degree.

‘Maude,’ he said, after there had been a long silence between us, ‘Maude, may God have pity on me, if I have to give you up!’

The face which looked into mine was deadly pale; the hands which held mine trembled; the voice which spoke to me was broken and hollow. I saw it all: and standing there beneath God’s sky, in the quiet evening, I inwardly vowed that he never *should* give me up. I would search for him day and night; I would follow him over sea and land; I would track his every footstep over the earth, but I would never give him up!—never, never!

And I will keep my vow.

One moment more, and we had parted.

It was much later than either of us had

been aware of. It was the first time Edgar had let me be out late. Aunt Louise herself opened the door, and I was not prepared for her serious looks. I have had so much liberty that I had forgotten she might wonder where I had been, and expect to know. It grieved me very much to evade her questions, and I am afraid she was grieved too. What can I do? I think I will go to her now and tell her all before my courage fails. She is a happy wife. I am her sister's child, and she loved Mamma. What will she think when she knows about it, and that I have been here all this time and never told her? I will go now.

## CHAPTER XXII.

Stonecross, Thursday, July 29.

I AM at home again. Home! how strange and unreal all seems! I arrived about five o'clock. Dr. Vanny did not come up with me. Papa was not at home. Gypsie stood at the lodge, so I got out there and walked up the drive with him. Aunt Gretta came to the front door, and Maggie was just getting up from the depths of an arm-chair as I entered the drawing-room.

After I had taken off my things, and Aunt Gretta had had time to think of it, she wept tears of joy that I had not been smashed to atoms in another railway collision, and Maggie exclaimed, 'Good gracious, Maude! didn't you feel queer to be in a railway accident?

What had you on? Wasn't it all spoilt? I should think you could never wear your hat again!'

'Very likely,' I said, laughing. Maggie's heartlessness did not affect me in the least. One heart was my own—that was enough. I asked no more.

'My dear,' said Aunt Gretta to Maggie, 'do not, pray do not talk of your sister's hat; it seems like trifling with Providence, and such a dreadful thing to happen! It may happen again if you talk of her hat!'

'La, Aunt Gretta!' was all Maggie's response.

'I am not at all sure yet,' said Aunt Gretta, 'that Maude has no bones broken; of course there are some bones broken; it would not have been a railway accident, if no bones were broken.'

'There are not in me, Aunt Gretta,' I said. 'I am as sound as a bell.'

'I can't think how it is you look so well,' said Aunt Gretta. 'You must have some

internal injury which the doctors have not found out, and which will develop itself by and by. I never heard of anyone who had been in a railway accident looking as well as you do—quite rosy and strong! I thought you would want nursing for a month at least.'

A slight tinge of regret unconsciously mingled with Aunt Gretta's tone. I believe she had been anticipating her favourite employment and felt almost inclined to reproach me for having disappointed her.

'Were there any gentlemen in the carriage with you, Maude?' asked Maggie.

'Only one,' I said; but do what I would the crimson flush dyed my face.

'La, how you are blushing, Maude! Who was he?'

'I don't know, I'm sure; some old rheumatic patient from Banton.'

Maggie's countenance fell. 'Is that all? I thought from your looks it had been someone worth travelling with.'

'If I had only been there, Maude,' said Aunt Gretta, 'I am sure I could have suggested something to do you good.'

'Dear Aunt Gretta, I did not want anything,' I said. 'Aunt Louise is such a kind, loving nurse—you can't think how she devotes herself to her husband; all her time is given up to him—as, of course, it ought to be,' I added; 'no woman could do otherwise.'

'Dear me!' said Maggie. 'I am sure I would not. Why does she not have a nurse for him? They are rich enough to have twenty.'

'Oh, Maggie! A nurse for her husband, when she loves him so dearly!'

'That's no reason she should wear herself out with waiting upon him,' said Maggie, 'and lose all her good looks. I am sure if I had to nurse my husband, I should be tired to death in a week, and wish myself unmarried again.'

'It is Aunt Louise's greatest happiness to be with him,' I said. 'She would be miser-

able to let anyone else take her place—she loves him.'

'Dear me!' said Maggie, 'you've told me that once. I suppose she does, but I would not be made into an old nurse if I did love him.'

I said no more, and Aunt Gretta, having recovered from her disappointment, began again.

'I am afraid, my dear, your Aunt Louise cannot understand very much about real nursing, however much she loves her husband. I never hear that he is much better or worse, and in my opinion, he ought to be one or the other. I've no notion of invalids remaining just where they always are, and neither doing one thing or the other. There are so very few people who really know how to nurse.'

All this time Gypsie—my little Gypsie—had been nestling in my arms, now and then raising his head for a kiss. He looked up and said,

‘Sister Maude.’

‘Well, Gypsie?’

‘If ever I’m ill, you’ll nurse me, won’t you?’

‘Yes, yes ; but, Gypsie, you are not going to be ill ; you have been poorly, I know, whilst I have been away, but you are better now.’

And Gypsie laid his head down again, and said, ‘Yes, I am better now.’

And then papa came in. He gave me a grave kiss. ‘Maude, I am happy to see you at home again, and I rejoice that you have escaped the manifold perils through which you have passed. You have cause for great and deep thankfulness, my child, for what has happened since you were last here.’

‘Oh, papa, I have indeed ! and I am thankful.’ The words came from my inmost heart ; I could not help it. I believe papa was very much astonished at my hearty response ; he had not expected such a genuine

acknowledgment of 'mercies received.' He coughed and a—hemmed.

'I am glad, Maude, that you are so sensible of your obligations, and I trust that this will not be a transitory sentiment, evaporating in empty expression, but that you will give by your actions a practical acknowledgment of the past goodness granted you.'

'I mean to, papa,' I said. 'I mean to show my thankfulness by my actions.'

Papa took his spectacles off, wiped them, and put them on again. I do not think he was quite prepared for the state of mind in which he found me. He turned to Aunt Gretta.

'I trust tea is prepared, as I desired it should be, half-an-hour earlier than usual,' he said; 'our vestry meets at seven precisely, and, doubtless, Maude will be desirous of refreshment after her journey.'

'I have no doubt it will be quite ready at the time,' said Aunt Gretta. 'Rawlins is very punctual;' and when papa had left the

room, she turned to me: 'We have a new head housemaid since you were here, Maude. Baines has left to be married, and such trouble as I have had to get her into my ways! and James has taken such a dislike to her; most unfortunate and very unreasonable, for she is an excellent person, though not young or pretty. She is most valuable and trustworthy, and was sixteen years in her last situation, and they are sure to get to quarrelling. I am sure James ought not to quarrel with her, for it is as difficult to meet with good servants as your papa finds it to meet with a schoolmaster. He is not suited yet, nor likely to be; the meeting to-night is about it. What a pity Mr. Farren ever left! I am sure, I wish, with all my heart, that he would come back; your papa will be tired to death, or catch dreadful colds with going to those meetings.'

I assented.

'Maude,' said Gypsie.

'Yes, Gypsie.'

‘ I have never seen Mr. Farren for such a long time ; do you think I shall ever see him again ? ’

Tea was announced at the moment. I thanked James and Rawlins from the bottom of my heart. Tea passed much as usual, only that I took more part in the conversation, and was asked many questions. It was very pleasant to be made one of the party, and I could not help inwardly and heartily congratulating myself that Charlotte and Mr. Retnor had not yet made their appearance ; they were expected at supper.

Papa left immediately after tea. Aunt Gretta insisted upon unpacking all my boxes herself, with the help of Rawlins ; she wanted to see what clothes needed airing and various other matters, and would fain have pressed me into the service ; but I left her to it on one condition, which was, that one little box should be untouched. I could not have had anyone but myself touch that box, for my one or two treasures were there, and though

safely locked up in my dressing-case, I did not choose that careless hands should take out the case that contained them. Very little they were indeed ; what they were to me Heaven knows ! Only two notes, relating to times and places of meeting at Banton, and one lock of hair : that was all ! And what trouble I had to get that one lock of hair no human being will ever know ; he did not think 'it would be right, until after he had seen papa.' And as for his likeness, which once, in a fit of extreme boldness, I ventured to ask for, I believe he would just as soon have given me his head !

After tea, Maggie kept me, inwardly chafing a whole hour, while she examined me as to the dresses I had seen at Banton, what shaped hats were most worn, what new things I had bought, how Aunt Louise dressed, &c. ; rewarding me at the end of the hour by two pieces of information, one of which was, that I had come back quite as stupid as I went, and the other, that Char-

lotte was going with us to the seaside this year as usual.

The first piece of information was no news ; the second, I thought of for a moment, and then put it from me, as I did everything now relating to the future, and I left Maggie lamenting that our visit this year would be later than last, owing to that stupid railway accident. She had some particular reason, she hinted, for wishing to go earlier this season than usual. What this reason was I did not stay to find out. I had been longing the last hour to be off with Gypsie to the church-yard, and as soon as Maggie released me, I set off with him.

We walked along very slowly and quietly. Gypsie's joy at having me back seemed to have a quieting effect upon him, or else—was it ? no, it could not be that my darling was not well ! It crossed my mind as we stood together, where we had often been before, that Gypsie looked paler and thinner than when I

had last seen him. I sat down by the grave-side, and took him into my arms.

‘How nicely little Mary has kept the grave !’ I said, half aloud.

‘Who?’ asked Gypsie.

‘Little Mary out of the village has attended to it while I have been away, Gypsie ; she would not let me pay her, but I have brought her a beautiful present.’

‘Has she been here?’ said Gypsie. ‘She never brought me with her, Maude.’

‘No, she was not likely to do that, Gypsie dear.’

‘Why not?’ said Gypsie. ‘I like to come here. I used to come with you and Mr. Farren.’

‘Hush, Gypsie !’ I cried.

‘Why, Maude?’ said Gypsie, astonished. ‘Don’t you like to think about Mr. Farren ? I do.’

I did not speak, and Gypsie, thinking he had grieved me, put two little warm arms round my neck and kissed me.

‘Mr. Farren was very good to me,’ he said, ‘and I should like to see him again some day. Everyone is good to me, but he was better than good.’

‘I know he was,’ I said ; and I held Gypsie tighter and nearer.

‘If I were to go to Heaven, Maude, would Mr. Farren come to me by-and-by ?’

‘I don’t know, Gypsie,’ I said.

‘Don’t you ?’ he said, disappointed, ‘because you know I should like him to. I want to see him so much, and papa says he won’t come again here, so I shall have to wait until I go there.’

‘No, no, Gypsie, you won’t.’

‘Won’t I ?’ said Gypsie ; ‘how do you know ?’

‘Don’t say anything more about it, Gypsie, please,’ I said, and Gypsie said no more.

We sat quiet. Eight o’clock struck from the church tower, and then the bells began their evening chimes. It was a common thing for the ringers to practise in the evening, and

papa encouraged them. The Stonecross peal of bells was considered the finest in the county. Papa had spent a deal of money over them, and he liked to hear them. Gypsie and I were not too close to the tower to make the chiming unpleasant. Mrs. Morris's grave was in a far corner of the churchyard, a very retired and secluded corner, and Gypsie and I sat and listened. Wave-like through the air came the peals, now swelling, now falling, now rising, now sinking. There was no other sound to break the evening stillness; the churchyard is too far from the village for anything but a faint hum to be heard occasionally. It had been a very hot day; myriads of insects dimmed the air; not a cloud relieved the unvarying blue of heaven; my brook was silent, and a solitary bird, warbling its vesper hymn, was the only sound, besides the bells, which disturbed the quiet. Gypsie lay watching the scene, and listening, without speaking a word.

I was quiet too. A strange, dim, brood-

ing sense of what was before me lay heavily on my spirits. Another week, and my destiny would be decided. Before Gypsie and I sat there so quietly again, I should know whether I might or might not be Mr. Farren's wife. Before we came there again, he would have seen papa, and I should have seen him, and they would all know, and Charlotte and Mr. Retnor too, that I wanted to marry the man who had been the village schoolmaster.

What were the alternatives? On the one hand, there was the loss of everything which, in the eyes of my family, was deemed necessary and important. There would be papa's displeasure, Charlotte's anger, Aunt Gretta's wonder, Maggie's ridicule, the amazement and comments of the whole neighbourhood to encounter. There would be loss of position, society, and friends; for my heart prophesied that if I married him, it must be in the face of opposition and resentment. If I did not marry him? Then I should be untrue to every instinct, passion, and emotion of my being.

I should destroy every chance of my own peace and of his. I should give up every hope, every joy, every desire for good, every moment of happiness of which I was capable ; and my heart cried out, 'I will not do it, I will not !' There was Gypsie—true ; and my darling was never more precious to me than he was at that moment. It was hard to leave him—it was the only thought that made me waver. Could I do it ? I faltered. Never see Gypsie more ? How could I bear it ? It was a dreadful wrench—a sharp struggle—still, still—'I have loved you long, Maude ; you are all I have to love.' Yes, if it came to a point, I would do it ; and as I thought of it, I strained Gypsie so closely to me, that he roused himself up and looked into my face.

'What is it, Maude ?'

'Nothing, Gypsie, nothing. We must be going now ; the sun is beginning to set.'

'Yes. Maude, will there be bells in heaven ?'

'I don't know, Gypsie. Your favourite,

John Bunyan, says that when his pilgrims crossed the river, “ all the bells of the celestial city did ring.”

‘ Then there will be bells there ! I wonder if God will let me be a little ringer, Maude ? ’

‘ Gypsie, dear ! ’

‘ I don’t think, though, I should like to be a ringer, Maude, it would tire me so. I would rather lie in God’s arms and hear the bells at a distance. I should like to feel what God’s arms are like, Maude. I should like to lie there and listen, and watch the sun set, as we have done to-night.’

‘ Don’t you remember, Gypsie, often reading to papa, that the city “ had no need of the sun to lighten it, for there will be no night there ” ? ’

‘ Yes ; I had forgotten. I am sorry, for I like it to be night, Maude, for then it rests me when I am so tired.’

‘ Are you tired now, Gypsie ? ’

‘ A little. I often am ; ’ and we went home.

I wonder what made Gypsie talk in this way ; it was not like him.

It is only three hours since Gypsie and I sat in the churchyard. I don't mean to go there again until ——. I have been thankful every moment since I came home that I got that promise from Edgar. I cannot think how it is, but I seem to have lost all the hopefulness which I had when I was with him. I never knew what it was to feel depressed when he was with me ; now, I have the most strange unaccountable depression stealing over me and numbing me. I cannot describe it. I feel as if I were being closed in and could not escape. But this is not being 'brave.' His 'brave little Maude !' Yes ; I will be that ! I will bear all his troubles and keep all my own to myself.

Charlotte was here this evening when we returned from our walk, and Mr. Retnor came in with papa. Then I began to get wrong, for I drew back when Mr. Retnor offered to kiss me, and he said I had come

back 'as high as ever.' I wonder if it is necessary to let a brother-in-law kiss you ! I wonder if it is generally done. It is so extremely disagreeable ; nay, it is more than disagreeable to me now. To have Mr. Retnor kiss me after—but then, of course, he knows nothing about *that*. Papa heard Mr. Retnor's remark, though he did not know the cause of it, and I heard him murmuring something about 'pride going before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.' Perhaps the words were only suggested by his thoughts at the moment, and not meant for me.

Dr. Vanny came in before supper was over. He sat down by me, put his hand under my chin, turned my face round to look into it, and then said, 'It seems to me, Maude, that the air of tunnels and the noise and smoke of a crash suit you. I haven't seen you look as you do now for many a long day. What's brought the colour back into your cheeks ? We'll send you into a tunnel the next time there's going to be an accident, if only

we can get to know about it beforehand. You're a saucy girl to look so well.'

'I feel quite sure Maude can't be really well,' said Aunt Gretta; 'who ever heard of anyone being quite well after a railway accident?'

'I have, madam,' growled Dr. Vanny.

'It must have been a most uncommon instance,' said Aunt Gretta, 'and it really seems to me most unlikely, and almost like a temptation of Providence.'

'I generally deal with things as they are, not as they seem,' said Dr. Vanny, 'and I find it the best way.'

'Maude must be very careful and nurse herself well,' said Aunt Gretta, 'and I hope in time she will cease to feel the effects of such a dreadful affair; it makes me quite ill to think about it.'

'She needn't be careful at all,' snapped Dr. Vanny; 'and I should think it the most sensible thing not to think about what made me ill.'

I really some day shall take it upon me to give my dear old friend a little lecture upon the way in which he is always quarrelling with Aunt Gretta ; it is his one failing ; but if I go away I shall lose Dr. Vanny too. He will disown me as well as the others. But Edgar always was a great favourite with Dr. Vanny.

It is striking twelve. I must put my book away, but I want to put down one thing. I did tell Aunt Louise all about Edgar, that last night. I was just going to her, when I heard her in the corridor, and immediately afterwards she knocked at my door. I believe she came because she thought she had seemed rather displeased with me when I could give her no explanation about my being out late, and she wanted to give me another kiss to efface the remembrance of her manner. I am glad that nothing had occurred to bring it up between us before, for I can tell papa now that Aunt

Louise knew nothing about it; so no one can have any blame but myself.

Aunt Louise heard all I had to say in wondering silence, and the only thing she said was, 'God help you, Maude; God help you and pity you!'

And now, my book, I am going to put you away. I shall lock you up, and between your leaves I shall put my notes and lock of hair. I dare not keep them about me, for fear of losing them. I shall not write another word in you until after the coming week is passed! Then I shall know what is to be. I shall only come and look at my treasures and wait patiently.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

Wednesday, August 4.

EDGAR has been, and is gone !

I had a letter from him this morning. Here it is. I have put it in my book. It is enough. I cannot write ; it must do instead :—

‘ I have seen your father, Maude, and it is all over ! I knew it would be so ! I expected it ; but I did not expect he would be and say what he has been and said. I was mad ever to dream of anything else. I will not tell you what he said. I will not blame him. I will not tell you what I feel at this moment.

‘ He might have let me see you once again—just once, Maude ; but he would not—not for an instant ! He would not let me

send you one word, one token, one message ; would not let me say "Good-bye," or ask you to forget me ! He will never let me see you again, never speak to you, or write to you ! May God—forgive him !

' Maude, I do not know what I am writing ! Burn it, and forget it. He has forbidden me to write to you, even this once. I told him I should disobey him I must bid my little Maude a last farewell !

' We must submit. I have long since given over fighting against destiny, fate—call it anything you will. I am afraid I am not a believer at this moment. I shall be calmer soon. Now, I know how much I had hoped, even though I told you I had no hope. That was a lie ! I *did* hope, although I would not own it. I hoped, I believed, I thought to win, and now—I have lost ! lost all—lost faith, hope, rest, love ! I have lost my Maude. Fool that I was ever to dream so madly and so wildly of winning !

' And now—who will care for you now,

Maude? Who will love you, cherish you, protect you as I would have done? Who will be so tender to your faults, so true to your interests, so mindful of your good, so jealous of your happiness, as I would have been? No one; for I love you as a man loves only once, and as most men never love at all. Little Maude! my cherished love, my precious gift, my tender flower!—so true, so brave, so faithful, so trusting, so infinitely dear—how dear, God knows!—farewell.

‘I charge you, Love, be patient, be brave: do right, forgive all, and—if there be a God and a hereafter—we shall meet again! ’

‘EDGAR FARREN.’

He is right. We shall meet again. I shall go to him.

Monday, October 4.

I have been very ill. I have had brain fever, and this is the first day I have been allowed to be up—the first time I have been left alone for many weeks. I have persuaded

my nurse to leave me for half-an-hour, and now, for the first time since last July, I have drawn out my book, and taken from between its leaves Edgar's lock of hair, the two little notes I had at Banton, and his one letter. Here they are—all I possess—except—except what? 'Bitter memories, to make the whole earth blasted for his sake!'

Yes ; if he had kept his promise, I could have borne all. I knew how it would be. I knew that if he were haughtily repelled, he would be just as proud and haughty himself, and go away without one word to tell where he had gone. I was certain he would never attempt to urge the matter upon me, or to suggest the possibility of my ever being his wife. I knew, that in his false and overstrained idea of duty, he would say that we must submit, without attempting to alter anything. But still, I trusted his word ! I felt quite sure that, having once given me his promise, nothing would ever make him break it. And he has broken it ! All I believed in, of

truth, or goodness, is gone for ever! Oh, my love, my love! I would rather—aye, how infinitely rather—have kissed those dear eyes into their everlasting sleep, than know you had broken your word, and told a lie!

For, Edgar, you have told a lie! You gave me a solemn promise at Banton that, whatever happened or wherever you went, you would let me know; and now you have left me here alone! Alone, to battle with all the anguish and despair of the past ten weeks, and never sent me one word. In all this wide world, I do not know where my love is! Living or dead, true or false, loving or unloving, I know not! It is very bitter, very cruel!

And it was you who taught me to believe; you, who dragged me out of the depths of black despair and lifted me into the light; and you have only plunged me back again into the darkness! You, whom—

Monday, November 8.

I have been ill again. I suppose I have had a relapse. I became faint and ill whilst writing the last time. Mrs. Nilson, my nurse, blames herself for letting me sit up so soon, especially for leaving me alone; but I do not think it was that. It was not her fault. It was not anyone's fault; and now I am better and stronger, and becoming more so each day. The last two days I have been down to breakfast.

I said I was getting better, and I am—quickly and surely. I feel fresh life, fresh strength, fresh vigour, every hour. I do all I can to get well. I *must* be well, for I have a long journey before me. I am going to Edgar; I am going to be his wife.

Yes; I mean to leave my home and go to him. I am quite, or rather I shall be quite, equal to the journey in a week's time.

Let me tell all that has happened since I last wrote. My nurse has left me. I am pronounced well enough to be left to the

tender mercies of Aunt Gretta and Rawlins. Poor Aunt Gretta ! I believe it has been a terrible disappointment to her, not being allowed to nurse me through this illness. But they thought I should die ; that was in the very hot weather. Now it is November, and yet there lingers still such a tender beauty, such a pathetic blending of departed glory and coming weakness, as makes all very lovely to me. There are shades of brown and red and yellow on the woods ; there is a richer radiance and a deeper dye in the clouds ; there is a fuller depth and a broader sound in the whispers of the wind ; there is a freshness and edge and keenness in the air. Autumn is slipping into winter.

I should like to finish my book before—before I am Edgar's wife ! The days seem so long now !—now that I am waiting and longing for them to pass ! Aunt Gretta will only let me go out when it is very fine and warm, and then stay a very short time.

Papa, Charlotte, Maggie, and Gypsie are

at Cheltenham. Papa is coming back on Saturday for the Sunday, and then I think Aunt Gretta will return with him on Monday for a few days. I have begged Dr. Vanny so much to say that I am not to go, that he has forbidden it, and said that the best thing will be to leave me quietly at home to get up my strength.

Charlotte has a baby. I have not seen it, but Aunt Gretta is in raptures over it; and it is only because news have come that it is not quite well, that Aunt Gretta will leave me here, and go to Cheltenham for a few days. I have never seen Aunt Gretta so happy as she is now,—with my illness, then Charlotte's. She is growing quite young again under such propitious circumstances.

I have been ill a long time—a very long time it seems to look back upon. I can distinctly remember all that happened until the time of my illness, and then there comes a great blank, when I can remember nothing. That must have been when I was delirious.

Then I remember when I awoke, as it seemed, to life again, and found myself in bed and perfectly weak, with Mrs. Nilson established as my nurse.

Every incident of the day I was taken ill stands out with the vivid distinctness with which I always remember anything which has impressed me strongly.

When did I last write before my illness? It was the day I received Edgar's letter, between three and four months since. For one week—the first week after I had that letter—I expected every day to hear again from him. He had promised me, and I perfectly trusted him. But I heard nothing. Day after day passed. I shudder at the remembrance! I will not let myself think of it.

That three weeks was the most terrible time of my life. Looking back upon it, quietly and calmly now, I can say with perfect truth that I was going mad. Day by day, I felt it creeping over me, clinging to

me, mastering every power, benumbing every faculty, destroying all strength of resistance ; and I could not shake it off ! Hour by hour, it came nearer, nearer ; and I could not stay it !

The first week, I could bear what I had to bear quite well ; every day, I was sure, would bring me news of Edgar. Then, when one week had passed and not a word came, my hopes began to fail ; and when a fortnight had gone, I think utter despair took possession of me. I ought to have trusted him more ; but it was hard to bear up. It was hard to be left all to myself to bear the agony of doubting him.

For I was left all to myself. That was the method papa took of marking his extreme displeasure, and his sense of my conduct. If he had been very angry with me, it seems to me that it would have been nothing at all compared to leaving me utterly alone ! He was so much displeased, that after he had once spoken to me on the matter, he took no

further notice of me in any way. He never spoke to me, he never looked at me; I will not dwell on that time. He had desired Aunt Gretta and Maggie to pursue the same line of conduct. They could not carry it out as fully as he did; still, to a great extent, they were obliged to—at least before him; for papa considered it right that his displeasure at my conduct should be signally evinced. Perhaps he was right. It is all over now!

Papa had desired Aunt Gretta that Rawlins or Reynolds might put Gypsie to bed every night, so that was taken from me. Was it right? Heaven knows. But Gypsie's love must find some little outlet, and it did. Every night, all through those three weeks, when I went into my bedroom, I had not been in two minutes before a little voice came at my door—'Sister Maude!' and when I opened it, there stood Gypsie, in his white gown and bare feet; and then, when I drew him inside the room, he would say, 'I

only wanted to say "Good-night" all alone to you, Sister Maude, dear Sister Maude ! I love you so much !' and for one half minute those little arms would be round my neck, and those sweet dewy lips pressed to mine, and then he was gone. He never failed to come one night during those three weeks, and I looked for his coming as the hungry captive looks for his morsel of daily food. Precious little comforter ! How can I leave you ? Understanding nothing, yet hoping everything, and loving through all !

Papa could not tell Gypsie not to notice me. It was not in human nature—even in perverted and mistaken human nature—to do that. Nor could Gypsie, by possibility, have obeyed such an order. So papa kept him entirely with him—scarcely ever out of his sight—and I was literally alone ! Suddenly thrust from the intensity of joy to the hopeless agony of despair, I succumbed. Since that time I have never been able to think of a prisoner being condemned to the silent

system, for ever so short a time, without tears of sorrow.

At the end of the three weeks I gave way. Day by day I yielded to the demon who was entering in and taking up his abode within me. Aunt Gretta was quite as usual to me before then, and she would never have been otherwise had she not been obliged to obey papa's orders, when they related to his own daughter. But I think Aunt Gretta thought that I had been punished long enough, and both she and Maggie were just as usual before that terrible day when I was stricken down. If I could have had Gypsie, perhaps I might never——

Let me hasten on. Days of dreary anguish were mine, only to be followed by drearier nights ; nights that no sleep soothed, or blessed dream of forgetfulness visited ; nights which, when they came, made me wildly cry out for day, and then, when day came, passionately long for night : a time when hope on earth and hope in heaven gra-

dually and totally expired. Had I had one human being to speak to, one ear into which I might for one moment have poured some little of my anguish, and thus gain a momentary relief; had I had one face into which I could look and read there, only pity—just pity—though no power to help; had I ever had one word of sympathy, I think I might not have so utterly sunk, but I had none. Every look was averted; every tone was harsh; every glance was cold; every moment was an hour; every hour was a day; every day was a year, pressing with slow, leaden footsteps upon my brain and heart; while, above all and in all and through all, only one idea dwelt day and night—Edgar was false; Edgar had deserted me!

Could I have prayed—but I could not. All my poor trembling belief utterly failed. Harder and harder, more defiant and more bitter, grew my thoughts of God, until I utterly and entirely hated Him. I would not have bent my knee to Him then, would

it have saved my soul to do it. I felt He was merciless, cruel, and pitiless, and I hated Him. That is the only way I can describe my feelings at that time.

It was August when I was taken ill. Aunt Gretta had been kinder even than usual to me for many days. I suppose I must have looked very ill, and again and again she was anxious to send for Dr. Vanny's assistant. Dr. Vanny himself had been in London for more than a fortnight, but he was expected home then. I would not hear of Aunt's proposition. I have a keen remembrance now of her face, when she tried to argue with me about sending for Mr. Thorpe. Dear, patient Aunt Gretta ! I suppose I did look ill, but papa thought that it was all temper, and that the best way was to leave me to myself. Perhaps it was.

I remember going out that Tuesday afternoon. I had been out all the morning, restlessly wandering up and down. It was terribly hot—a fierce, sullen, blazing heat, not a breath

of air stirring ; a heat so great that papa, who was going to drive down to the village and take Gypsie with him, had come into the drawing-room before starting to desire that no one would go out until evening. I disobeyed. Though the order could scarcely be said to be given to me, as he had not spoken to me for nearly three weeks—still, I disobeyed. I was wildly restless. I could not remain in the house ; it choked me, and I asked Aunt Gretta to go and sit outside with me. I was afraid to be alone, and yet I loathed company. Aunt Gretta very much objected to going out, but I was imperative, and she obeyed. I say *obeyed*, for I remember distinctly it was really obedience.

I remember I could not stay near the house, but insisted on going as far as the meadow through which my brook runs, and there we sat down. I must have relapsed into one of those terrible fits of moodiness out of which I used to start with a desperate and smothered cry for life to end ; for when

I came to myself, Aunt Gretta was talking about Charlotte and Gypsie, and trying to soften what I daresay she thought was the grievance uppermost in my mind ; for I knew that it was by Charlotte's advice that papa pursued the course of conduct which he did. Charlotte was scandalised and shocked, as well she might be, at the disgrace I had brought on the family, by daring to love a being so beneath me as Mr. Farren, and still more by my obstinacy and perverseness in continuing to love him when I had been ordered not to.

How long Aunt Gretta had been knitting and talking, I do not know. The first words I was conscious of were—' You know, my dear Maude, naturally, Charlotte was very much shocked at such a thing as— dear me, how very unfortunate it was, Maude ! Even had it been everything that could have been wished, I always considered Mr. Farren very delicate ; he had such a brilliant colour, and looked so very excited when talking in that

rapid way of his ; but you must go and see Charlotte, and you will find her just the same as usual.

‘ I do not doubt it,’ I said.

What the tone was in which I spoke, I cannot tell, but Aunt Gretta, I remember, said no more about Charlotte.

I turned upon her, I am afraid fiercely—I was fierce—constantly fierce, and I said, ‘ Aunt Gretta, did you ever love anyone ?’

‘ Love anyone ?’ she repeated, in an absent tone, intent only upon picking up the stitches which she had dropped through her start at the suddenness and abruptness of my speech.

‘ Yes ; love anyone ?’ I repeated.

‘ I love you, my dear,’ she innocently replied, ‘ of course, and your sisters and Gypsie ; it would be strange indeed, if I did not, poor children, left without a mother.’

‘ Aunt Gretta,’ I cried, ‘ can’t you tell what I mean ? Did you ever love anyone as I love—Mr. Farren ?’

‘ Dear me, Maude ! ’ she said, ‘ whatever is wrong with you, that you speak so quickly and loudly ? You quite startle me ! ’

‘ Answer me,’ I said.

‘ Well, my dear, I was twice engaged, I think, when I was young.’

‘ I know that,’ I said, ‘ but what I want to know is, did you *love* them ? ’

‘ Well, I suppose I loved them,’ she said, ‘ or if I didn’t, I should have done, of course after I was married ; but you know, my dear, I think, on the whole, I ought to be very thankful that the engagements were broken off, for it relieved me from all responsibility.’

I asked no more. Aunt Gretta had never loved.

There was silence between us for some time, but in that silence my heart cried out voicelessly—unheard. The cry went into space, and brought no answer ; it mocked me with a cruel taunt. My love, my love ! My hot hands were stretched out in vain ! Passionate pleadings, yearning grasp, eye that

*would* see and voice that would be heard !  
In vain, in vain !

I turned my head, and, in doing so, caught Aunt Gretta's gaze. It brought me to myself, and I laid my hands firmly together on my knee, and tried to look as I thought I ought. Aunt Gretta could not speak for several seconds. How long she had been watching me, and how long I had forgotten her presence, I cannot tell. She looked quite pale.

'Good heavens, Maude !' she said, when at last she had found her voice—and Aunt Gretta must have been strangely moved to use such an expression—'what is the matter with you ?'

She could say no more. Her knitting had fallen from her hands and lay on her lap. She must have dropped at least a dozen stitches.

'Nothing is the matter with me,' Aunt Gretta,' I said, as quietly as I could.

'But I am sure something is,' she said,

angrily; 'do you think I am going to be put off in that way? I am sure there is something very much the matter with you, and I insist upon knowing what it is; you have taken a violent cold with sitting so long on the damp grass, and you are in the first stage of scarlet fever; your hands are burning and your lips are as parched and dry as they possibly can be.'

'My hands are not hotter than my heart! Oh God, I wish that I were dead!' I cried, utterly breaking down.

Aunt Gretta could not speak. I am certain that, in her own mind, she thought the second stage of fever had come on and that I was delirious.

She began to treat me with the pitying indulgence we give to invalids. 'Come in, my love,' she said, coaxingly, putting her arm round me; 'there, lean on me; your limbs must ache dreadfully, I know, poor child!'

'No, no, they don't,' I cried, in that insane demand for sympathy we experience when

suffering has made us very weak ; 'they don't, but my heart does.'

'Ah, poor dear !' said Aunt. Gretta, gently stroking my head, 'poor dear !' and I heard her mutter to herself, 'I knew I was right.'

'I cannot go in, Aunt Gretta,' I said, wearily resisting her.

'But you must, my dear, you must ! We cannot bring the doctor out here.'

'The doctor'—the words roused me to actual life. 'I will not see Dr. Vanny, Aunt Gretta ! I will not !'

'Very well, my dear, you shall not,' she said, in her most soothing tone ; 'you shall not ; only come in !'

'I will,' I said, for I was beginning to feel spent, 'I will, if you will not tell anyone I am ill, and will not send for Dr. Vanny.'

'That's a good girl ! You always were a good girl in illness, Maude ! Come, my dear, lean on me.'

It was necessary. Aunt Gretta led me

gently in. Dear Aunt Gretta ! Small as your light is, it burns steadily and brightly.

We did not meet anyone, and when I reached my room I sat down on my low chair, for I could not stand. Aunt Gretta began to unfasten my dress.

‘Please,’ I said, ‘just let me lie down as I am and be quiet.’

There must have been an excess of weariness in the tone for Aunt Gretta to accede to such a request and to allow such an unheard-of thing as an invalid lying down in that unorthodox way. Something must have touched her strangely, for she made no answer but ‘Very well, my dear,’ and then helped me to lie down.

I closed my eyes. It brought no rest. My brain seemed on fire. Every sense was quickened a thousandfold. Every limb ached to move, but lacked the power. I was alive in every nerve. I heard the faintest sound. I saw the least thing. I could not keep my eyes shut; they would open and

watch, as by fascination, every movement of Aunt Gretta's.

She went to work with a will, and proceeded with her operations in the most orderly and systematic manner. Her forethought would not have disgraced the commander-in-chief of a large army preparing for a campaign. She divested herself of her rich black silk, and put on a soft grey camlet. She then suddenly disappeared, and after a few moments I heard heavy footsteps approaching ; the door slowly and solemnly opened, and the large, heavy medicine-chest, which usually occupies the recess in the attic, appeared, carried with infinite pains and trouble between Aunt Gretta and Elizabeth, the under-house-maid. A grim and ludicrous sense of what was going on around me and of my own utter helplessness seized me, and I laughed. A ghostly, hollow, wild laugh it must have been, to judge from the start which Aunt Gretta and the girl gave and the uncomfortable looks they turned upon me and then upon each

other. I heard Aunt Gretta whisper, ‘Poor thing, poor thing ! I am afraid it is going to be a bad case ;’ and the housemaid whispered, in reply, ‘Surely the doctor should be sent for.’

I started up. ‘Aunt Gretta, you promised me ! I will see no doctor !’

Aunt Gretta came up to me. ‘There dear, hush, hush ! I will not send for him ; anything you like, only be still ; poor dear, poor dear ! What a providence this is !’

The housemaid stood motionless, and looked at me with eyes full of amazement.

‘How very sudden Miss Maude has been taken, ma’am ! When did it come on ?’

‘Aunt Gretta,’ I cried, ‘let me be left alone, quite alone.’

‘You shall be quite quiet, my dear. Elizabeth shall go after she has helped me just to fold up this carpet. Superfluous carpet in a sick-room is always very objectionable. Here, Elizabeth, very quietly, just take it upstairs ; we shall not want it again for a long time, I

am afraid' (with a small shake of the head towards me) ; ' and then, Elizabeth,' she added, in a whisper, ' we will have off these valances and hangings ; contagion lies so much in these kind of things—as gently as possible, Elizabeth—poor dear ! You begin at that end and I will take this. I daresay we can finish them in half-an-hour and get them all cleared away.'

I sat up upon my bed once more. I believe my eyes were blazing. Aunt Gretta and the girl evidently thought that I had lost my senses.

' Aunt Gretta,' I said, ' I cannot bear it ; will you leave me ? will you send Elizabeth out of the room ? and—do not think me unkind—but will you go too ?'

' But, Maude, my dear, so much has to be done in a sick-room, and we cannot look for Providence to aid us unless we use means. Elizabeth, you can go. I will not disturb you, Maude ; I think I can manage these valances by myself. Go, Elizabeth.'

‘Aunt Gretta,’ I said, speaking with one more desperate effort, ‘if you don’t leave me at once, I will get up and creep into the garden, even if I die there.’

I shall never forget Aunt Gretta’s look. She went at once towards the door; but there she paused, turned back, went on tip-toe to the medicine-chest, took out a large bottle, poured a quantity of its contents on to a handkerchief, put the bottle on the table, doubled the handkerchief, and, without a word, placed it on my head. I knew by the smell that it was laudanum. I acknowledged it by mutely pointing to the door, and, awe-struck, Aunt Gretta glided out of the room.

I was alone—alone with Memory, intensified to a thousand-fold power—alone with Imagination, heightened almost to delirium; alone with Hope blotted out, and with Despair—vivid, changeless, unfaltering—always holding out stern, cold hands to take me to her embrace. And I was going to her! I felt it as I lay there, with not a sound to

break the silence but the tumultuous throbbing of my head. It was in vain I tried to bring my thoughts into something like order—to master the wild imaginations which ran riot with every drop of my hot blood, and flitted before my eyes, blotting out the beams of the golden summer sun which streamed with chastened radiance through each shaft of the drawn blinds. Yes, I was left alone with my grief, and I lay there to battle with it.

I do not know how long a time had passed when I became conscious of a low murmur in which I could distinguish at intervals the voices of Maggie and Aunt Gretta, the measured cadence of Papa, and the boyish sweetness of Gypsie. Papa and Gypsie had returned, then; and my thoughts instantly flew forward to Gypsie's bed-time, when I knew he would come in for his nightly kiss, which I coveted with all the insane madness of a miser. Human lips should touch mine, and I should feel the pressure of loving arms, though but for a moment! Perhaps it might

bring the relief of tears to ease my burning eyes ; and as I thought of Gypsie, I clasped my hands together, and tried to bear the pain in my head, which every moment seemed to grow worse and worse. If only I might not have been so terribly conscious of everything ! If only my sense of feeling might have been dulled instead of having that preternatural keenness !

Hour after hour passed. No one came near me ; they left me in peace. In peace ! well, I was thankful to be left in despair. And still that terrible pain in my head tortured and racked.

And then the night came on ; and it came on quickly in my darkened room ; and I began with terrible waywardness to long to see some human face as much as a few hours before I had loathed it. I wanted something now, real and actual, to drive away the phantoms and visions which thronged and peopled the space around me. Nine o'clock struck—Gypsie would be up directly. Then I heard

his little pattering steps coming up the shallow stairs, and behind him the measured pace of Rawlins. I heard him coming nearer the door, and I rose from my disordered bed, flung my hair back, and put out both hands to greet him. He was at my door—he passed—he went on—he was in his own room. I heard them move about for five minutes—heard with a sense of hearing that did not miss the slightest sound—then all was quite still, and I heard Rawlins go down, slow and stately as she had come up. Gypsie had gone to bed without one word or thought for me! For the first time—the only time in all the seven years of his life—Gypsie had not whispered, ‘Good night, Sister Maude.’

I got up from my bed, and, guiding my trembling feet by each piece of furniture I could lay my hand on, I went to the window. I was strong now, and quite calm. I drew up the blind, I threw the window wide open, and, holding fast by it with both hands, I looked out. It was not dark yet; some red

beams lingered in the heavens ; some bright hues yet played among the leaves of my two trees—my two—standing before my window, and some of their branches came so near that by putting out my hand I could take hold of them, and as I did so, I fancied they spoke to me. I saw them move and bend towards me. A low, murmuring sound ran through their leaves. It was their voice ; they did speak, and I listened.

And as I listened, darkness wholly stole into the room ; one crimson gleam shot in and played upon the wall as if a blood-red hand had come from the skies to write my doom in strange words. I turned from the window to watch it ; it danced up and down as the broad leaves played with its light ; it grew deeper and deeper ; its meaning grew stranger and stranger ; it glared—it lit up the room—it changed—it flickered—it faded—it died away. I had read its meaning.

I left the window open, and turned and crawled back to the bed ; and as I lay there,

with eyes that would not close, I longed in the darkness, with all the wildness of ungovernable desire for something to break in upon my solitude; some sound of human kind—some voice of a fellow-creature. I thought I must cry aloud for Aunt Gretta, or some one, to come to me and dispel the shapes which flitted round me. I thought I could not wait until they came up to bed before I saw some one. If only one of the servants would come—something to dispel the haunted stillness! Maggie, or even Papa or Charlotte, in that hour, I would have been thankful to see. But I could not call for them; I was utterly prostrate now.

And so I lay, and every pulse seemed to measure an hour, and yet ten o'clock did not strike. But it did at last; I counted the strokes; I heard the bell ring, and I heard the servants enter the library, and all was still. Oh, the awful stillness of that time! It passed; and Aunt Gretta would soon come, and she would sit by me, and put something

cool on my head, and leave me lights—plenty of light in the room to scare away the forms and faces which hovered about me. And I would ask her to leave Reynolds or Rawlins with me all night. I would not be left alone any more.

Again I listened, and heard the closing of doors—and it sounded to me like the shutting out of hope for ever. I heard the slipping of bolts—and it was like the grating of prison bars upon the condemned captive's ear. I heard James's quick tread as he brought the small steps into the hall, and placed them on the tiles with a sharp, grating sound, and I knew that at the same moment he put out the light—and I felt as if the light was for ever put out of my soul. I heard Pontiff's wild howl of liberty as he was unchained for the night—and it fell on my ear like the howl of an imprisoned fiend suddenly let loose to work me mischief. I heard Papa's measured step coming up the stairs—slow, slow, slow—steady, steady, steady—nearer, nearer, nearer

—and it sounded like the step of the Avenger, marching relentlessly on to his victim ; and as I listened, I shuddered, and stopped my ears and smothered my head in my pillow.

When I looked up again, every sound had ceased ; there was perfect stillness. I lay and listened ; I sat up and listened ; I stretched out my hands and listened. I tried to raise my voice, but I could not. They had left me quite alone ! Not one had come near me—not one ! They had left me to the madness that was stealing over me—to the ghostly images which thronged around me—to the many-phantomed and awful hours of the night—to the peopled darkness and the pale faces which looked out upon me from it ! I might die, and in the lashed state of feeling I then was in, I hoped and believed I might. None would know of it, and as I realised that, there seems to come a blank space in my remembrance, and I cannot tell what immediately followed.

Then I was conscious of a wild strength,

and I sat upright, with eyes wide open, and a new phantom seized my brain. Upon the bed on which I lay, my mother had died. Every incident of that night came back with a fierce power to my recollection. I lived the whole scene over again, and as I did so, a dim sense of a Presence floated round me—came near me—stood before me—touched me! I cared not. That Presence brought no relief, did not soothe one pain, did not satisfy one craving. Mother, was it so? Did you come to your child, or was it the fever's wild delirium—for it left me as before?

Again I rose from my bed, and again I crept to the window, which I had left open, and I gazed out into the darkness. Masses of cloud were lying folded in the arms of heaven; deep blotches obscured the face of the moon, but as I looked they partly rolled away, and I could see each familiar object in the room. Then the clouds rolled entirely away, and the full light shone in and showed me—what? A bottle—standing out distinct

and clear in the light, close to my hand, gleaming in the brightness! It came like a ray of hope on the midnight of my distempered being. I knew what it contained—the laudanum Aunt Gretta had laid down on the table when I imperatively ordered her to leave my room.

I looked at it; and as I looked I grew quiet—I grew at rest. All would yet be well. No one would ever have the least suspicion how it had come about. I remembered distinctly Dr. Vanny saying one day that without an examination there were no symptoms observable in death produced by laudanum to denote how it had occurred, except the smell; and I knew that the quantity which Aunt Gretta had put on my head, and the bottle which she had left uncorked, would sufficiently account for that. It would never be found out. I was in a burning fever. I knew it; my head was on fire; the fearful heat had brought on a sun-stroke. I had not been well for days, and being out in the hot sun that day had

been too much for me. It was a most unfortunate circumstance that the doctor had not been sent for, and that the sad event had happened in the night, but I had absolutely refused to see a doctor, and insisted on being left quite alone.

Yes ; I knew quite well everything that would be said and done. A little hurrying and confusion and excitement ; a few wondering exclamations ; an enquiry into the how, why, and wherefore ; some consolatory calls and notes from neighbours, and all would be at an end. A month, and all the remarks excited by my folly and imprudence in persisting in staying out so long in the heat would have died away, and only my example would remain to be held up to obstinate and self-willed girls in future. ‘ Poor Miss Maynard ! She went out in the excessive heat that terribly hot August, though she had been warned against it, and she died a few hours afterwards all alone in the night ! ’

So it should be. ‘ All alone in the night

—really alone any time, though there had stood by me human faces and human forms. How quietly would come the end before morning dawned ! It would be peace and rest. I had never known them here ; should I know them there ? Perhaps there really was a God. It might be, and I had been wrong in thinking as I did about Him. Perhaps He had prepared a home for me ; perhaps He had really seen all my desires and resolutions, all my longings and endeavours, all my failures and discouragements, all my anguish and despair, all my love and its hopelessness. Perhaps He had, and perhaps He would pity me—even me, too weak for Life, and restless for Death ! Perhaps He would take me to the arms of His infinite forgiveness, and, holding me there, would blot out the Past and fit me for the Future. If my soul were really a spark struck from the blaze of His own light, would He let that spark die out in everlasting darkness, would He ? There *was* a God ; Edgar believed in Him,

and he would not do that without reason ; *he* always examined and thought for himself, and he believed there was a God. Well, then, I would go to Him. He who had made me would receive me ; He who knew all about me would be merciful to me ;—and so I put out my hand and took the bottle. Steadily and unfalteringly I held it, and, kneeling on untrembling knees, I asked that if there were a God He would forgive me and take me to Him. Then I raised the bottle to my lips—

There was a sound—a movement at the door—it opened ! Great God of Heaven ! Something all white glided in !—it gleamed in the moonlight—it came towards me—it touched me—it stood over me—it breathed upon me—it looked with deep, luminous, soul-searching gaze right into my eyes—it put its warm, human, clasping arms around my neck—it rained sweet tears upon my bowed head—it knelt down by me—it said,

' Maude, dear sister Maude ! I love you so much ! Won't you speak to me, sister Maude ?'

And at that voice Despair loosened her hold, but overtired Nature claimed her revenge ; and I fell down as one dead.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

I WAS conscious of sensation — of sound ; of a feeling of such utter prostration, it seemed as if life were leaving every limb. I heard movements around me, and voices — an audible whisper which seemed familiar, and I recognised Aunt Greta's voice and the snappy tones of Dr. Vanny.

‘I think she will be conscious soon, doctor.’

‘Do you, madam?’

‘Poor dear !’ and I heard Aunt Greta use her handkerchief. ‘What a Providence that Gypsie was so anxious to say “Good-night” to her, and waited till then ! She would be out in the sun, doctor, and she would not let me send for you. Poor dear ! she always was rather wilful.’

‘Should Maude recover, as God grant she may, I trust this will be a severe lesson to her to strive against her wilfulness.’

Papa’s voice! Then he was with me too!

‘Scarlet fever, I felt sure from the very first moment,’ said Aunt Gretta. ‘Now, if I had only been firm, and removed those valances!’

‘No scarlet fever in the case, madam.’ Dr. Vanny’s voice was very serious and subdued now. ‘Intense excitement acting upon a highly nervous system, which, being over-tasked, has succumbed. No scarlet fever in the case, but a terrible attack of brain fever!’

‘Are you quite sure, Dr. Vanny? because scarlet fever is so contagious, and these valances——’ and Aunt Gretta sighed deeply.

‘It is brain fever,’ repeated Dr. Vanny. ‘I trust Maude will pull through, but it will be a hard pull and a long illness.’

‘A long illness.’ Aunt Gretta’s voice grew perceptibly more cheerful. ‘I hope you may be right, Dr. Vanny; but, if it *should* turn out

to be scarlet fever, these valances should be taken down without a moment's delay.'

'But I tell you it is *not* scarlet fever, madam;' and Dr. Vanny spoke in a louder key. 'Did you not hear me inform you this moment that it was a decided case of brain fever? I must beg that when Maude becomes conscious, you will not name such a thing as scarlet fever. Immense harm is constantly done to patients by those who attend to them persisting in their own ideas.'

'Indeed there is,' Aunt Gretta assented, warmly. 'I have often made the same remark myself. What a Providence that you have doubts about it being scarlet fever!'

'I have no doubts,' said Dr. Vanny, more loudly. 'I told you I was certain what it is.'

'Perhaps in any case these valances should be taken down. What do you think, Doctor? If, after all, it should turn out to be scarlet——'

An unintelligible expression broke from Dr. Vanny's lips, only one word of which

I caught, and that word was 'woman,' and he turned, as it seemed to me, to leave the room. 'I can do nothing more for Maude now,' he said, and I thought he was addressing Papa; 'I will be in again directly. Perhaps something of this may be owing to the shock of that railway accident.'

'To think she should be on that line when there was going to be an accident!' said Aunt Gretta.

'I suppose she had not been told there was going to be an accident,' said the testy doctor.

'No, indeed,' said Aunt Gretta. 'What a merciful Providence it was to be sure!'

'Do you mean the accident was a merciful Providence, madam?' Dr. Vanny seemed to be pugnaciously stopping at the door for the very purpose of asking the question.

Fortunately Aunt Gretta did not hear him. When Dr. Vanny had left the room, I feebly opened my eyes. Aunt Gretta was engaged in fixedly contemplating the valances.

As I closed my eyes again, she was evidently preparing to speak about them, and I heard her say to Papa, 'Dr. Vanny *may* be right, but I confess I have my doubts, and if it should turn out to be scarlet fever after all——'

'Whatever it turn out to be,' interrupted Papa, 'Maude is undoubtedly in a most precarious state. Poor child! she little thought what suffering her folly would lead to. I remember particularly requesting that no one would go out during the intense heat of yesterday; she disobeyed; and then her obstinate and pertinacious desire to be left alone, brought on its speedy punishment.'

'What do you think, brother, about the valances; had they better be taken down at once?' was Aunt Gretta's reply to Papa's speech.

'I really am unable to offer an opinion upon the subject,' said Papa. 'I should advise perfect quietness. I am compelled now to go to the village for a short time, but I shall not be absent long.'

I heard all this, as well as the terrible pain in my head would let me. Then I heard Papa walk down stairs, and two minutes after the front door opened. Then I heard his step on the gravel walk, then the side gate opened, and I knew he was on his way to the village. Perhaps gone to marry a young couple, whom Heaven had blessed by giving neither of them a shilling in the world; or perhaps to read the prayers by the side of one to whom Heaven was sending 'Death the Releaser.'

As for me, I should 'pull through.' Dr. Vanny had said so, and he never spoke without reason. I lay quite still, while Aunt Gretta seemed to remain in a fixed attitude, gazing at the valances. Then she sat down on a chair by my bed, and drew out her knitting. I felt she was looking at me. I lay with my eyes closed, and Aunt Gretta knitted on, occasionally murmuring to herself, 'Poor dear, what a Providence!' I felt as if I must open my eyes; as if it were cruel

to keep her in ignorance that I was conscious ; yet I could not do it. I wanted to close my eyes for ever.

When Aunt Gretta next raised her eyes from her knitting, she found mine open and fixed upon her. She started and exclaimed, 'Maude !' forgetting in her astonishment to assume the sick-room tone ; but she remembered it in a moment, and rose and stood over me. 'My dear Maude,' in the softest and gentlest of tones, 'thank God, my dear child !' She said it so reverently and so sincerely, at the same time wiping some tears from her eyes, that drops of sheer weakness filled mine in reply.

'Am I ill, Aunt Gretta ?'

'You must not talk, my dear.'

'But tell me, have I been ill ?'

'My dear Maude, Dr. Vanny says you must be kept perfectly still.'

'Will you tell me ?' I said, with great effort.

Aunt Gretta forgot her caution.

‘ Ill ! Indeed, my dear, you have given us all such a fright ! and Dr. Vanny will have it that you are beginning with brain fever ; but I still have great doubts whether it is not —a-hem—those valances,’ concluded Aunt Gretta, sighing and looking at them. ‘ Now, if I only had had those down, I should have been quite satisfied. All would have been just as I wished.’

‘ Aunt Gretta,’ I said, as steadily as I could speak, ‘ tell me all about it ; I will know !’

‘ In a moment, my love. I do beseech you, do not agitate yourself. All will go well, Dr. Vanny said so ; but I am much mistaken if he is not wrong on one point.’

I felt very ill, but to know what had happened was the only definite feeling in my mind. That I *would* do, or I might lose consciousness again and never know. I tried to raise myself up in bed, but could not move. I tried to lift my hand ; it fell back again in perfect helplessness.

‘ Maude, my dear, don’t !’ cried Aunt

Gretta. ‘Be quite still, my dear! Poor dear, you are so weak!’

‘I will know, I will,’ I muttered with all my remaining strength.

‘Only be still, dear Maude, and you shall know all. You must have been taken very suddenly. And what a Providence, I am sure it was, that your papa would not allow Gypsie to come in and say “Good-night,” when he went to bed; for if he had come then, he would not have come again, and we should never have found you until morning, and who knows what state you might have been in then?’

I knew. I was beginning faintly to remember. Aunt Gretta went on—‘Gypsie ran out, calling that sister Maude was dead, and, oh, what a Providence it is, my dear, that I am such a light sleeper! I was in your room first. But, oh, Maude, my dear, what a thing it was! If I live to be a hundred years old, I shall never forgive myself, and never forget it to the very day of my death!’

‘What?’ I faintly whispered.

‘My dear, indeed I cannot understand. It quite passes my comprehension, for every one knows that no one is so careful as myself in a sick room. I have a natural talent for nursing—always have had—but it would be owing to your sudden illness, and the confusion it put me into. I was so anxious to have all ready, and then, after all, not to have those valances down. And your papa would not let me come in to finish; he said you would be quite as well left alone, as you had insisted on it. I am sure he is very sorry now. And that is how I must have come to leave the bottle about, and find it all spilt on the floor. I had used it to put some on your head, when you were in such pain, poor child! Oh, dear; oh, dear! what a Providence! To think what might have happened, and Gypsie about! And then that Dr. Vanny should insist on knowing the least particular! I am sure he cross-questioned me just like a barrister in court, and I don’t know why he

should do it. I am sure he need not have made me promise so particularly never to mention it to anyone. I am not very likely to do that. I should have been horrified if the thought of such a thing as leaving a bottle of laudanum uncorked in your bedroom had ever entered my head ; and then that Dr. Vanny should lay his hand on it the very first thing !'

Aunt Gretta was so truly agitated that she forgot everything—her patient, her caution, and what she was talking about—and she did not hear Dr. Vanny's step on the stairs. He entered the room as she was uttering her last sentence in a very loud tone.

‘ Humph ! ’ he said, looking keenly at her ; and Aunt Gretta instantly subsided into an arm-chair.

Dr. Vanny came up to me, and took my hand in his. How strange that touch felt ! His so strong, and warm, and firm, and energetic ! Mine so limp, and languid, and listless, and lifeless !

‘Come, Maude,’ he said, in a gentle yet decided voice. ‘Come, Maude, look at me,’ and I was constrained to obey.

‘That is right,’ he said. ‘I knew we should pull you through! A nice long nap you have had for nearly twelve hours, but you are all right now, and you will have to behave better in future, I can tell you.’

He felt my pulse in silence. He put something to my lips, but I could not swallow it; and again there comes to me a dead blank—a time of no remembrance.

And then again I was conscious—conscious of racking pain, of weakness, of oppression, of unrest, of burning heat and intense thirst. Forms flitted about me; hands touched mine; voices sounded in my ears; food was put to my lips, but I could distinguish nothing; all was like a dream. By and by I learnt to recognise Dr. Vanny’s voice again, and know his step; and another voice—a pleasant, modulated tone, which I learned to like, to listen to, and which I after-

wards found out belonged to my nurse, Mrs. Nilson, whom Dr. Vanny had brought.

When I was getting better, I learnt from Aunt Gretta's artless speeches that the bringing of this nurse had sorely wounded her, but that Dr. Vanny was firm about it; in fact, he brought her and settled her by my bedside, before anyone knew of it. A few words from Papa were quite enough, and one of the first things which returning consciousness showed me, was Papa's face bending over me, and his tone of deep feeling, in which he said, 'Thank God, Maude, you are certainly better!'

Many days went over, and the crisis came and passed. I was pronounced out of danger, and I began to recover. Dr. Vanny said so, and the nurse said so, and Aunt Gretta said so, and I felt it—felt it in the return of sensation, of desire, of strength. Very little at first, but it came—surely and gradually. Then I could turn round in my bed without assistance; then sit up, supported by pillows; then

lift my own tea to my lips ; then notice what passed in my room, and hear what was said around me.

But very little passed. Dr. Vanny scarcely allowed anyone but himself and the nurse to be there. A great calm seemed to settle in the room ; a calm after a storm ; that storm, every circumstance of which was so indelibly impressed on my memory. All the remembrance of it returned to me as I recovered strength. I used to wonder how it was that nothing seemed to come near me to annoy me ; I wondered how it had all been arranged, till, as I grew stronger, I divined by a strange consciousness that it was owing to Dr. Vanny. How I wondered at his intuition ! Aunt Gretta sat and knitted in my room sometimes for an hour, but I found it was under a strict promise never to speak to me more than a few words at once, and this very seldom. Her remarks were usually confined to, ' Poor dear child, what a merciful Providence ! ' or, ' It was the most providential thing that I am

such a light sleeper!' or 'Ah! Maude my dear! what good nursing has done for you!' Dear Aunt Gretta! patient, forgiving Aunt Gretta!

I soon grew familiar with my nurse, and learnt to have perfect confidence in her. What had made Dr. Vanny select her? She might have been made for me. It was repose to watch her neat, orderly, deft management. If I spoke to her about Papa or my sisters, she always seemed to know just what to say. I could never have the faintest suspicion but that she thought me the happiest girl living, and that Dr. Vanny's order about them not being admitted was the most natural thing in the world. She always seemed to have ready for me just what I wanted and when I wanted it. And when, as I grew stronger, a little natural longing crept into my heart and a wonder as to what Papa and my sisters thought to it all, either Papa or Maggie would be sure to be standing by my bedside soon after, or nurse had a kind message for me

from them. Charlotte was ill, so she could not have come, had she wished.

I soon learned to talk to Mrs. Nilson with the utmost frankness, when the mood was on me. She never seemed startled at my wickedness, never seemed shocked at my strong expressions, never urged me to what was out of my power, never looked grieved that I did not try to do what others recommended, and I grew to be with her as I had once been with one other person—perfectly frank and open.

My sick-room gradually became indescribably restful, and I dreaded the leaving it; for it became apparent, even to me, that I must leave it. When my mind began to settle darkly on the past, a new antidote was at hand. I had never asked for Gypsie, never seen him, ever since I had regained strength and consciousness. The strangest feelings filled my heart at the thought of him. Had it not been for Gypsie, I might have been—where? Why had he come to me?—if he

had but left me alone, I should not have been lying there, feeling better every day. Very soon, I should have to go down, and face them all again, and begin my old life. Nurse would leave; Papa, and Charlotte, and Maggie, would be all just the same, and I —; I was only just twenty-one; I might live a very long life; and if it had not been for Gypsie, there might have been more words under Mamma's monument now—another 'Madeleine Maynard.' I did not love Gypsie less; I loved him as much as ever, but — a long life to live! And as I thought of this one day, I turned my face to the pillow with a smothered wail. Nurse heard the sound.

'Did you speak, my dear?' she said, with that respectful kindness which my many weeks' helplessness had begotten in her.

'No.'

'I mean, did you want anything?'

'No. Nurse, shall I soon be well?'

'Very soon, my dear, with care.'

‘Do you think I shall live to be sixty years old?’

Nurse neither looked astonished nor perplexed at the suddenness and irrelevance of the question. She answered as quietly and simply as if I had asked her what kind of a day it was.

‘I cannot tell; but God knows.’

‘He does! Do you believe there is a God?’

‘I am sure of it.’ Nurse quietly took up her sewing and sat down.

‘Do you think He knows all about my illness?’

‘Certainly.’

‘And what happened before?’

‘Yes.’

‘I mean things which nobody else knows about, but——but——’

‘But yourself? Yes; you can know nothing, but God knows it too, and loves you as dearly as He knows you thoroughly.’

‘I don’t believe a word you are saying, nurse!’

Nurse made no reply ; she neither seemed shocked at my rudeness nor horrified to hear the daughter of a Doctor of Divinity stating such opinions ; she quietly went on with her sewing.

‘Nurse,’ I said five minutes after, when I found she did not speak, nor seem to think there was any occasion to, ‘Nurse, I did not mean to be rude.’

‘You have not been rude, my dear,’ she said.

‘Nor did I mean to say anything wrong.’

‘You have not said anything wrong, Miss Maude.’

‘Then you do not think it wrong for me to say so?’ I asked.

‘I should think it very wrong of you to say the opposite, if you did not feel it.’

‘But do you not think that a clergyman’s daughter ought to feel it?’

‘I do not know that there can be any “ought,” about feeling,’ she replied ; ‘and as to being a clergyman’s daughter, that makes no difference, Miss Maude.’

‘ But do you quite believe what you said, nurse ? ’

‘ Of course, I do, my dear,’ said nurse, quietly. ‘ I never say what I do not quite believe.’

‘ But why did you not contradict me, if you knew I was wrong ? ’

‘ You spoke of your own feeling, not of the fact,’ said nurse ; ‘ whatever your own feelings are, the fact remains exactly the same.’

I lay quiet after this, thinking over those last words, ‘ exactly the same.’ They had been spoken so quietly ; without any vehemence of declaration, without any warmth of feeling, without any reticence of doubt ; it was a simple, established fact to nurse ;—‘ the fact remains exactly the same.’

I spoke again in a few moments : ‘ Nurse, have you ever heard Papa preach ? ’

‘ No, never. You know I am a stranger in these parts ; but now, Miss Maude, I wouldn’t talk any more, I would go to sleep.’

With me, nurse's, 'I would,' and 'I would not,' had begun to be as authoritative as Dr. Vanny's 'It must be,' and 'It must not,' and soon afterwards I went to sleep with the words, 'the fact remains exactly the same,' ringing in my ears.

When I was lying awake that night, I kept repeating the words, 'exactly the same,' again and again to myself. All was quiet; I imagined nurse to be asleep, yet I did not hear any breathing like a sleeper's; a red fire was in the grate, the night lamp burned steadily, I could see everything in the room in dim relief. I heard the hall clock strike. I counted—eleven—twelve o'clock! I shuddered. Urged by a tremendous impulse, I sat up in bed; a horrible power seemed to draw my eyes to the corner where the medicine chest had been, and I turned my head to look. The chest was gone; in its place I could see the dim outline of a small new table; it seemed to be made of something which glistened in the light, and I found out after-

wards that it was Derbyshire spar ; on it was a vase of beautiful flowers. A great sigh came from my breast, and I heard a gentle voice by me saying, 'What is it, my dear ? Do you want anything ?' I held out both my hands, and said, 'Nurse, nurse !'

She sat upon the side of the bed and put her arm around me and my head on her shoulder, and I burst into tears.

Nurse took no notice or made any remark ; she let me cry myself quiet, and then, giving me something to drink, she said, 'Now, if you will lie down, I will sit beside you, and perhaps you may sleep.'

'I have been asleep, have I not, nurse ?'

'Oh yes, you have been sleeping nicely.'

'Will you talk a little to me, nurse ?'

'Yes, if you would like it ; but let me show you these beautiful flowers ; Gypsie gathers them every morning and every night ; fresh ones for the day, and fresh ones for the night. You never seem to notice them.'

I knew Gypsie brought something to my

room. I had heard his knock at the door and his little voice night and morning.

Nurse turned the light higher and brought the flowers to me. I looked at them, but said nothing, and nurse took them away.

‘Have you noticed your new table?’ she said.

‘No; is it new?’

‘Is it not? It is a present from Dr. Vanny.’

‘Where is that—I mean—what stood where the table now stands?’

‘The medicine-chest? Oh, that was so heavy and unsightly, the Dr. would have it away at once. Dr. Vanny likes things to look pleasant in a sick-room. You were unconscious at the time, and knew nothing about it.’

Unconscious! I had not always been unconscious.

‘Nurse,’ I said presently, ‘will you say over again what you said this afternoon?’

Nurse turned the lamp low again and came and sat on my bed, rested my head

against her, and repeated in a low voice—  
‘ You know nothing about yourself which God  
does not know too, and He loves you as  
dearly as He knows you intimately.’

‘ Papa preaches such beautiful sermons,  
nurse,’ I said, after a pause.

‘ Does he ?’ said nurse, quietly ; nothing  
more.

‘ Yes. Nurse, are you a Christian ?’

‘ Yes.’

‘ You never quote texts to me ?’

‘ That is not necessary to my being a  
Christian.’

‘ I am glad you don’t. I don’t like texts  
being quoted to me, would you, nurse ?’

‘ I cannot tell. I might not under some  
circumstances, but I love the Bible.’

‘ Love it ! do you ?’

‘ Very much indeed.’

‘ Why do you, nurse ?’

‘ It comforts me ; it satisfies me ; it speaks  
to my heart ; it is a companion when I am  
lonely ; it makes life such as I can bear it ; it

makes death such as I am not afraid of ; it makes me sure of Heaven, where I shall have all I so much wished for here, but could never get.'

' Have you longed for things here, nurse, which you could not get ? '

' Many things, my dear.'

' And you will never have them ? '

' Never.'

' And you may live a very long life ? '

' Very likely I shall.'

' And still, you will never get them ? '

' Never.'

' You have never wanted some things so much as I have, nurse.'

' Perhaps I have not, my dear.'

A poor, weak, childish thing I was. Had nurse contradicted me, or argued the point, she would have lost her influence over me ; she admitted that I had wanted some things more than she had, and could not get them ; there was comfort in the admission, and I blessed her for it.

‘ You do not know, nurse, how I have wanted some things.’

‘ I do not, my dear, but God does.’

‘ He has not let me have them, and yet you said He loved me.’

‘ Very true; He loved you so much, He would not send you them.’

‘ I wanted death. Oh, nurse, I wanted it so much !’

‘ I know you did, my dear; He knew it too.’

‘ But He has not given it to me.’

‘ No; because He knew enough about you to know that life would be better for you.’

‘ How did you know, nurse ?’

‘ Never mind, I guessed a good deal, but God is perfectly acquainted with it all, and has not to guess; if He had, we could not be sure of His sympathy, but *there is no guessing work with Him.*’

‘ Nurse, are you sure ?’

‘ As sure as I am that I am speaking; as

sure as I am that you have been ill ; as sure as I am that there is a God at all.'

'Are you always sure of *that*, nurse ?'

'Quite, but once I was not.'

'Were you not ? Oh, I am so glad ! But you know nothing about me, nurse.'

'I know something, and I believe that one day you will love God, see Him, be with Him, and be perfectly happy.'

'Perfectly happy !' Me ? without Edgar ? I laughed bitterly.

Nurse took no notice of my laugh. In a minute or two, when I had grown calmer, she said—

'Now, Miss Maude, I wouldn't talk any more ; lie down, and I will make your pillows comfortable, and say a hymn to you.'

I obeyed ; she arranged my pillows ; laid my head on them ; took her own chair by my bedside, and by and by, in a low voice began, and this was the hymn she said :—

Lord, it belongs not to my care  
Whether I die or live;

To love and serve Thee is my share,  
And this Thy grace must give.  
If life be long, I will be glad  
That I may long obey ;  
If short, yet why should I be sad,  
That shall have equal pay ?

Christ leads me through no darker rooms  
Than He went through before ;  
He that into God's kingdom comes,  
Must enter by this door.  
Come, Lord, when Thou hast made me meet  
Thy blessed face to see ;  
For if Thy work on earth be sweet,  
What will Thy glory be ?

Then I shall end my sad complaints,  
And weary sinful days ;  
And join with the triumphant saints,  
In singing Jesu's praise.  
My knowledge of that life is small,  
The eye of faith is dim ;  
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all,  
And I shall be with Him.

## CHAPTER XXV.

THE next day, when Dr. Vanny stood at my bedside, and looked at me, as he generally did, after his professional visit was over, he said, 'You may sit up a little to-day.'

I made no reply. I did not want to get up ; I did not want to begin life again, I only wanted to be left alone. If I might not die, surely I might be left alone.

'Eh,' he said, looking at me with a strange expression. 'Why don't you say, "Thank you ?" it would only be civil. Aren't you thankful ?'

I was obliged to speak.

'No,' I said.

'No ?' he repeated ; then you shan't get up ; you shall have another week of it, and

see what you say then. Nurse, this young lady does not put hand or foot from under the bed-clothes for another week. There's nothing cures wilful people so fast as letting them have their own way. Nurse, you hear ?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Now will you say, "Thank you ?"' said Dr. Vanny.

'Thank you, Dr. Vanny, and thank you for the pretty table in that—that corner.'

'Humph ! who said anything about a table ?'

'Nurse told me that you had sent it for a present.'

'Old nurses don't always speak the truth, so mind how much you believe.'

'My nurse does,' I said, looking gratefully at Mrs. Nilson.

'How do you know ? You look as if you could say "Thank you" for your nurse.'

'Oh, yes ; thank you a thousand times.'

'You don't say that for your doctor !'

I laughed, he looked so irresistibly comic as he raised his eyebrows, screwed up his mouth, and shook his head slowly from side to side.

‘I am glad to hear you can laugh,’ he said; ‘but people who have to lie in bed don’t laugh. Laughing is only for those who can get up; crying is for those who lie in bed.’

‘Oh, it is so nice,’ I could not help saying.

‘“So nice!” you must be shaken out of such niceness. I had tea here yesterday, and I could not get any cake. Maggie was too lazy to make any, and I won’t eat it if the servants make it, so I shall have to wait until you get up.’

‘I will make you some, if ever I can again, Dr. Vanny,’ I said.

‘“If ever!” Ever and never are long days for the young. Where do you get your flowers from?’ pointing with his thumb over his shoulder to the table.

‘Nurse says that Gypsie gathers them every morning and evening.’

‘Nurse says! I told you not to believe all that an old nurse says. Why don’t you ask Gypsie yourself?’

‘She is not an old nurse,’ I said, anxious to resent his rudeness, and equally anxious to avoid being questioned about Gypsie.

‘She isn’t very young,’ he said, coolly staring her in the face. ‘I dare take my affidavit she’s on the shady side of forty.’

‘Why, Dr. Vanny!’ I exclaimed, aghast at his rudeness.

‘Why, Miss Maude!’ he said, mimicking my tone, ‘why don’t you ask Gypsie yourself about the flowers?’

I did not speak.

‘Why don’t you answer me?’ he said ‘don’t you know it’s civil to speak when you are spoken to?’

‘I have never seen Gypsie since my illness,’ I faltered.

“Never seen Gypsie!” he repeated, in

a tone of horror, although he had known it perfectly well before I had told him. ‘Here’s a heathenish state of things! Oh, Maude, Maude! good-bye; here’s Aunt Gretta coming,’ and he stalked out of the room with a ceremonious greeting to Aunt Gretta as she entered.

Soon after, I heard the usual little knock at my door, and then the sweet voice, ‘Nursie, here are the flowers; hasn’t sister Maude asked for me yet?’

‘No, my dear.’

‘Oh, nurse! mayn’t I just come in and look at her? I won’t make any noise, not a bit!’

‘Not this morning, Gypsie dear; you shall come in some day, but not yet,’ and I heard Gypsie sob as he turned away; and nurse said, as she came back to my bed, ‘Poor little Gypsie has gone away crying,’ and I made no reply.

Papa came and sat by me half-an-hour that day, and Maggie brought a cushion and

footstool and sat down to talk to me, but I did not hear Gypsie's voice, though I listened.

I did not talk to nurse again that day ; I did not talk to anyone ; and when Dr. Vanny paid his evening visit, he did not talk to me ; but before he left, he went up to the flowers and smelt them, and turned them round and examined them.

I watched him. I wondered what he was thinking. I wished he would say something. I did not want him to see that I was watching him, but when I least expected it, he turned round so suddenly and sharply, that he found my eyes upon him before I could either close them or turn away. He nodded a 'Good night' to me and nurse, and left the room without a word.

I listened for Gypsie's step and voice that evening as I had never done before. He did not say one word as he gave the flowers to nurse except the usual question, ' Nurse, is sister Maude any better ? ' and nurse an-

swered, 'Yes ; she is indeed, dear little Gypsie ;' and he went away.

I wondered if nurse would be awake that evening ; I thought of what she had said to me the evening before, and I wished that night would come that I might see if she remembered too. Papa came in and said, 'Good night, Maude ; I should think the doctor will have you up soon ; I imagine it would be more beneficial than lying in bed.' Aunt Gretta hovered about, and smoothed the counterpane and adjusted the blind, and put all the bottles in different positions on the stand, and picked up two cinders which had fallen from the fire, and wiped a speck of dust off the glass, and put the lid on the top of the soap-dish, and turned the flower vase to the other side, and placed the window-curtain in straight folds, and stooped for a shred of paper which Dr. Vanny had thrown on the floor, and whispered three times at intervals to nurse, with her finger up to ensure nurse answering in a low tone, kissed

me, and finally turned round when she reached the door and gave a last lingering look at the valances, accompanied by an ominous shake of the head—a duty which she punctually performed every evening—and at last she was gone; and I—who had been lying with eyes as much closed as would admit of my seeing at all—opened them wide and watched nurse as she quietly arranged the room for the night; and then all was still.

I wondered if nurse would go to sleep; I would not awake her if she did; so I laid and thought, and turned round and thought, and went back to my old position and thought, and heard the clock strike eleven and then twelve, and I said softly, ‘Nurse!’ She was sitting by my side, I found; she spoke directly.

‘Yes, Miss Maude.’

‘Do you not go to bed, nurse?’

‘Sometimes—just as it happens. I do not generally lie down at the beginning of the night.’

‘ Why do you sit up, nurse ? I do not want you now ; I am getting stronger.’

‘ Do you not ? Well, I will lie down now, if you wish it.’

‘ No, nurse ; I don’t mean I wish it—just now. Will you come and sit on my bed as you did last night, and—and—’

‘ And what ?’ said nurse, as she complied with my request.

‘ Will you talk a little to me, nurse ?’

‘ If you wish. Are you sure it does not tire you ?’

‘ Oh, nurse, it rests me. Nurse, were you ever ——’

‘ Ever what, dear ?’

‘ Have you known what it is to be quite alone in the world ?’

‘ I have felt what it is to be quite alone.’

‘ That is what I mean ; quite alone, nurse ?’

‘ Quite alone.’

‘ And to feel that you will always be alone : that some great gulf, which could

never be bridged over, separated you from everyone ?'

'Yes.'

'Was it a sorrow, nurse ?'

'A great sorrow.'

'And you have lived through it, and can smile and look happy now ?'

'I have lived through it—lived to be able to look back upon it without shuddering; lived to be willing to live as long as God chose, and in just the manner He chose; lived to feel that I shall never be alone again.'

'Never alone, nurse ? Who is with you ?'

'Jesus.'

So soft, so low, so unhesitatingly it was spoken, that I held my breath and raised my head to look. Was He with her now ?

'Is He with you now, nurse ?'

'Yes.'

Was there any sign, any token, any visible Presence ? Was it a fact or a fancy, a reality or a strong delusion, an imagination or a truth ? What was it ?

‘Nurse, your trouble could not be so great as—as some other people’s, or you could never be as you are now.’

Nurse made no reply.

‘Could you, nurse?’

‘Yes; why not?’

‘Because—because you could not have got over it so well.’

‘I could not, but my Master can do everything.’

‘Everything?’

‘Yes, everything.’

‘I have often heard Papa say in his sermons——’ I began.

‘I would not think about Papa and his sermons just now,’ said nurse, gently.

‘Nurse?’

‘Yes.’

‘Would you mind telling me something about your trouble?’ I asked. ‘Did you ever love some one very much?’

‘Very much indeed.’

‘And did he die?’

‘No ; if he had, I would have thanked God every day of my life.’

‘Oh, nurse ! thanked God that you might never see him again.’

‘I should have seen him again, and he would always have seen me.’

‘What did he do, nurse ?’

‘He said he loved me. He deceived me a long time, and then he left me.’

‘Was he all you had to love, nurse ?’

‘No ; I had one other—a very dear friend, whom I loved and trusted next to him.’

‘Then you were very happy ; you had two whom you loved.’

‘Yes, I loved her very dearly. We had played together, studied together, grown up together ; for I was an orphan. I had no sisters, no little brother to love me dearly ; no father to be truly sorry when I was ill ; no aunt to be kind to me. I lived with an uncle who did not love me at all, who felt me a great burden, and who longed to have me out of the way. So this friend was all I had in

the world until I had *him* ; and then I wanted nothing more. We were to have been married in June, and in the April before, he left me.'

' But you still had your friend to love you ?'

' No ; he married her, so I lost them both.'

' Married her ! Oh, nurse, nurse. And did you never see them again ?'

' I could have borne it better had I never seen them again, but they lived in the same town, and I saw them constantly.'

' They would be very miserable and very unhappy, as they deserved to be ?'

' I do not think they were either one or the other. I was wicked enough to think that I could have borne it better if they had been : but they seemed very happy and very prosperous. I often used to meet him with his wife by his side, and his little boy holding his hand, and he always looked bright and happy. Sometimes I saw him driving in a beautiful carriage, and three or four pretty children with him ; such a merry, happy party

they looked, and so fond and proud of his wife and little ones he seemed. The world prospered with him, and he grew very rich, and gave largely to charities, and presided at public meetings, and was kind to the poor. And so was she, and visited much among them, and gave away blankets and coals at Christmas, and I used to hear their names spoken with gratitude and praises by many—especially his. I have often heard the remark that he was always so cheerful, so bright, so like what a Christian should be.'

‘What did you do, nurse?’

‘My uncle died very suddenly, and his business was involved, and all his money went to pay his debts, and I had nothing; so I began to teach. I would have left the town, but as I was well known there I was strongly advised to stay, in the hope of being more successful than I could have been where I was not known; and God gave me some friends who were kind to me, and I always have had enough just to manage on by being

very careful and working very hard, but I could never save anything.'

'And what will you do for the future, nurse?'

'God will take care of my future.'

'Are you sure of that?'

'Quite sure.'

'Why?'

'Because He has said He would.'

'Do you quite believe all He says?'

'Quite.'

'I have heard Papa read that no "good thing will God withhold from them that walk uprightly." I know the words quite well, for I have heard them every Sunday morning as long I can remember. It is our Sunday morning psalm.'

'Yes. It is a precious one and a true one.'

'Then, nurse, was it not a good thing that you should have a home and be happy, instead of working for a bare living, and being among strangers, and perhaps—perhaps you will die in a workhouse.'

'Very likely I shall; I expect it. I have

never been able to earn anything beyond what was necessary to keep me at the time—but that was not the great grief.'

'It was the loss of his love?'

'It was the loss of love—his and hers. More than that—it was the loss of faith, hope, and trust in my fellow-creatures. It was the shock which taught me what those who had once loved me could be, and forget it and live on happily; and, worse than all, it was the failure of trust in God; that He could let such things be, and let them be happy and me be miserable; that He could let His world be beautiful and radiant, as if anguished drops of despair from His own children had never bedewed it. I thought that the earth ought to send up a cry for justice, and the heavens answer it, and my God avenge my cause. But the earth told it not, the heavens heard it not, and hell did not open her mouth to swallow up those who had injured me. And I had to live!'

'Nurse, have you felt all this?'

‘I have felt it all, my child ; felt it through times when the day and the night were alike to me, and all my existence was one grand spasm of untold pain ; when the sun had no heat, and the winter no cold for me ; when Heaven had no pity, and earth had no rest ; when man forsook me, and God did not hear me ; when I asked for the grave as my right, and oblivion as my hope, and annihilation as my heritage ; and I still lived on as if I had never asked for anything.’

‘And can you be happy now ?’

‘Quite happy, Miss Maude ; happy and thankful and at rest.’

‘And you believe God to be true, and just, and kind ?’

‘I believe Him to be infinitely true, and just, and kind. I would not be out of His hands ; I would not avoid anything He wished me to suffer, if I could ; I would not ask Him to alter a thing if He saw it best that it should not be altered. I love Him here ; I feel Him with me every day, and soon I shall be with

Him altogether. Is not this enough to make me happy, Miss Maude ?'

' I cannot understand it; I cannot,' I said.

' I know you cannot, just now, dear; but we had better not talk any more. Lie down, and I will say a hymn to you, as I did last night.'

And nurse said :—

Oh, heart too deeply loving  
    Why fling away thy gold?  
Love never can be bought or sold,  
    Love is no sum for proving;  
Why strive for what thou canst not gain,  
    And waste thy golden years in vain !

If one word hath the power  
    To set ablaze the skies,  
Or bring tears brimming to sad eyes,  
    And change life hour by hour;  
It prophesies of sorrow near,  
    In vain ! in vain !—thou wilt not hear !

It shows all things unreal,  
    For life—wide though it be,  
In all its wideness holds for thee  
    But one—thine own ideal;  
All other forms and faces fade  
    Before the idol thou hast made.

Look down, sad eyes, look downwards,  
The earth is full of woe ;  
Of wild laments and wailings low,  
Of harsh and jarring chords.  
Poor heart ! In soothing others' pain,  
The Light of Life will shine again.

And life *is* worth the living,  
Though as the years pass by  
They bring no answer to thy cry,  
No gift to match *thy* giving ;  
Though thou must journey sadly on,  
With scarce a hope to lean upon.

God gave thee life—to use it  
For His great ends, not thine ;  
And if the cup be bitter wine,  
Shrink not, nor dare refuse it.  
He knows thy love—He knows thy pain—  
Sad life ! thou wilt not be in vain.

I have the hymns nurse said to me, for I  
asked her for them.

When it was quite light in the morning, I  
looked earnestly at nurse to see what she  
looked like, and find out if I had not been  
mistaken in fancying she always looked calm  
and happy ; but I found there was no mis-  
take. The hair was nearly white under the

neat muslin cap, but it was as beautifully arranged as a girl's, and the mouth was sweet and pleasant, and the eye lighted up as she spoke, and her gentle laugh was as ready as Aunt Greta's expressed belief in Providence. I looked and wondered.

When I next spoke to her, I said, 'Nurse, when Gypsie brings the flowers, I will see him,' and nurse only said, 'That is right.'

About the usual hour I heard the little knock, and when the door was opened, it was immediately followed by 'Nurse, here are the flowers ; nurse, do you think sister Maude *any* better this morning ?' and nurse answered, 'Much better, Gypsie, dear ; and she would very much like to see Gypsie this morning, so come in.'

But Gypsie paused on the threshold. I could fancy I saw the blue eyes dilate ; the colour flush cheek, forehead, temple. I knew it did, for the sweet tones were thick, and the little voice trembled as he said, 'Do you mean it

*really, nurse ? may I come in and see sister Maude ?*

‘ To be sure, my dear ; sister Maude wishes it.’ And in one more moment the little arms were round my neck, the loving lips pressed close to mine, the fair hair mixed with my own, and the hot tears rained on my cheek, just as they had done many weeks before. ‘ Maude, sister Maude, I’m so glad, so glad !’

‘ So am I, Gypsie dear,’ I said, as soon as I could speak.

‘ Now, Gypsie,’ said nurse, in a minute or two, ‘ you had better go, for sister Maude is only very weak.’

‘ I haven’t seen her for such a long time,’ pleaded Gypsie ; ‘ mayn’t I stay a little longer ? I will be quite quiet—quite.’

‘ Not now,’ said nurse, decidedly ; and she lifted Gypsie from the bed and led him to the door, but he stopped there.

‘ Nurse, if I might have one more kiss I would be so good all the day.’

‘ When are you anything else ?’ said nurse,

smiling, as she brought him back, and then took him away.

My head was dizzy with pain ; my hands trembled ; my cheeks burned with fever. I saw nurse's grave face as she came up and looked at me, and I think she doubted her own wisdom ; and Dr. Vanny asked as soon as he came in what I had been doing.

I did not see anyone but nurse and Dr. Vanny that day ; the next day I was better, and saw Gypsie for a few moments, and in the afternoon I sat up for half-an-hour ; and the next day, with infinite pains, I prevailed on Mrs. Nilson to walk in the grounds for a little time and leave me alone. I longed so much to look at Edgar's handwriting again.

It was then I wrote a little in my book, and was taken worse, and had a relapse. Then three weeks passed, and again I began rapidly to mend, but a wretched, hopeless spirit had taken possession of me, and I loathed the coming back to life. I was moody and irritable, even to Gypsie and

Mrs. Nilson. I grew to hate Dr. Vanny's visits, for he would talk to me and make me talk, and I could not endure it.

When he would insist on trying to rouse me, I grew so irritable and excited that at last he left me alone. Sometimes he would sit silent for ten minutes together, and then abruptly leave me. He advised and wished me to come downstairs, but I shrank so intensely from it, that at last he ceased to urge it, but he began to talk of Mrs. Nilson leaving, and that I must positively make the effort to leave my room. Sometimes he would be angry with me—very angry—for a few minutes, but this was not often. I was too unresisting a subject for anyone to waste much anger upon, and oftener I would see him looking at me with a strange expression—an expression of blended pity, sorrow, and perplexity.

Papa paid me a diurnal visit. I never saw Maggie now. Poor Maggie! She said the last time she was in my room that she

could bear it no longer; she was moped to death.

At length Mrs. Nilson said she must leave. I did not oppose it. I know I was ungrateful; I think I was benumbed and not capable of any feeling. I do not think she would have left me even then, but Dr. Vanny insisted upon it, and said that Reynolds or Rawlins could wait quite well upon me, and that it would be a good thing for me to do more for myself. I made no remark, and no objection, and he went away very cross, and two days after Mrs. Nilson left.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

I THINK it was two days after this that it was the 30th of October. I remember the day of the month well, for it was Gypsie's birthday. He told me of it. It was the first time in my life that I had forgotten his birthday. It was Saturday, and Gypsie was seven years old. I think I must have been more unkind that day than usual, for I had desired Aunt Gretta and Rawlins to keep Gypsie away as long as possible. He came into my room in the afternoon, when it was beginning to grow dark, and asked if he might stay a little, as it was his birthday. I could not say 'No ;' and Gypsie said, ' Sister Maude, did you not remember ? '

'No, Gypsie,' I said, and he was silent for

I should think ten minutes, sitting on a low stool looking into the fire, and then he said, very suddenly—oh! why did he say that?—‘Mr. Farren did not forget last year! ’

It seemed as if a blow had struck straight to my heart. I shivered from head to foot; the room turned round; a terrible hand seemed tightly grasping my head. Why had Gypsie said that? He *had* forgotten me. He had forgotten all he had promised, all he had said, all he had done. Gypsie must have seen my looks in the firelight, for he rose trembling, ‘I will tell Aunt Greta to come, sister Maude; are you ill?’

‘No, no; you must not tell anyone; do you hear, Gypsie? I am not ill, but I want to be alone—quite alone. Will you leave me, Gypsie? I do not want anyone to come into my room.’ And Gypsie silently left the room.

Yes, it was Gypsie’s birthday. I remembered it all quite distinctly now. It was the 30th of October. Seven years ago that day

It was as fresh in my memory as if it had been only yesterday, and for the first time since my illness I let my mind dwell upon other scenes than those which were now never absent from me—never, day or night.

Seven years ago that day! I was then fourteen years old.

It was a blustering, stormy day; so wild that even I durst not creep out into the gardens. There was a strange stillness in the house, which grew unendurable to me, and I ventured at last, during a lull in the storm, to get out into the shrubbery. How well I remembered my delight at walking about among the damp, dank leaves, and hearing the sough which my feet made as they sank in them, and then a gust of wind would make the branches creak and groan, and would carry a shower of leaves whirling high above my head! And when I went in—trying to slip in unobserved—the first person I met in the hall was Papa!

I stood motionless to hear his reproof,

and when it came it only was, 'My dear child! run to the fire and take off your wet things!' I was struck dumb. My heart heaved; I longed to throw my arms around Papa's neck, and tell him how strange and precious his words and manner were; but I was afraid, I durst not. I had always found it a failure, and I had resolved to save myself from that cruel chill of awakened feeling by never trying again. What had made Papa speak so kindly?

I soon knew. A fresh influence was at work, and old habits for a time slept beneath its power. Even Charlotte forgot to scold me, and Maggie was stirred into something like excitement and energy, whilst I forgot everything in the world, but the fact that I had a brother!

Ah, Gypsie! Yours were the little fingers so omnipotent and powerful! How we stood over the baby when admitted to see him! how quietly and lovingly we all spoke! how kindly Papa smiled! how I looked up into

his face without the least alarm, and even ventured to slip my hand into his, and did not meet with a rebuff! How we all looked at each other, as if to read in each other's eyes the assurance that the baby was duly valued! and how Mamma, though she lay without speaking, smiled very faintly as she looked on! How I dreamt of the baby all that night, and sat outside the door the next day until admitted into the room; and then with what unflagging energy and tireless industry I nursed him!

After the first day or two, when Charlotte and Maggie nursed him too, I had him all to myself—nurse and I—for she was a very kind nurse, and would let me hold him a long time, smiling at my wrapt devotion. What a change that baby wrought in my life! All the latent love in my heart welled out at the sight of him. I was so gentle and amiable those few days, that they often wondered at me, and Papa said one day, 'I think baby's coming has done you good, Maude; I hope

it will last !' Ah ! if he had not finished with those words ! I was beginning to feel so glad that he had noticed a change ; why did he check the gladness by that wish, as if he doubted whether it could possibly last ?

I remember after Papa had said that, I left the room, and, going upstairs to nurse, I asked her to let me have baby. What comfort there was in feeling it in my arms ! Its perfect helplessness, its frail dependence, wound thick coils around my heart. I could say anything I felt to it, and fear no rebuke from its lips. I could see no unexpressed censure in its eyes. I need not be apprehensive ; I need not fear ; here was rest, here was safety. I was at home with it, if home means quiet, peace, repose. And the baby needed me. This was what gave the exceeding sense of preciousness—it needed me. I was necessary to it for the time being. Did I not care for it and watch it when it was in my charge, it would suffer : had I withdrawn my arm, it would have fallen to

the ground. It was in my power, and by that consciousness it appealed to my strongest nature. I grew better for having it : here was my Bethesda, where I received my gifts of healing.

But a change came. At the end of a week—and my love had grown stronger each day—at the end of a week, nurse would only let me stay in Mamma's room a few minutes, and I was not to speak, and the next day she refused me admittance altogether. And the next day matters grew worse, and Maggie cried a good deal, and Charlotte would scarcely speak ; and when she did, her words were sharper and shorter than ever, and Aunt Gretta arrived in the afternoon.

The next day passed in much the same way, only that we did not see Papa, and we were told that Mamma was very ill. And then the next ! It rained so much that even I could not find a moment when I could creep out into the shrubbery, and I sat in the library all day alone ; and there was not a

sound heard in the house, and we never saw Papa or Aunt Gretta, and dinner went away almost untouched, and tea the same, and I had crept back into the library, and was sitting on the hearthrug, with my head on a footstool, watching the fire, which was almost out, and wondering how long it would be before I could see the baby again, when the library door softly opened, and Aunt Gretta stood there. She came up to me, and said, in a very quiet, low tone, 'Maude dear, would you like to see your Mamma?' 'Indeed, I should,' I said, starting up, 'and baby too!' 'You shall, then, only you must promise not to make any noise.' 'I will not make the least.' My words came very slowly, and I shivered all over.

We went to the door of the room, and there she stopped and looked me in the face, and I saw some tears rolling down her cheeks, and my eyes began to fill. She led me into Mamma's room. Dr. Vanny was there; papa was there, and Charlotte, and

Maggie; and Papa's face was turned away, and I could not see what he looked like. Charlotte and Maggie were standing by the fire-place, and Maggie had her face hidden in her pocket-handkerchief. No one moved as I went in, and I understood all in a moment; but I did not speak or cry.

Nothing was heard but the dull, heavy splash of the rain-drop upon the window and the wail of the wind among the trees. In a few moments I heard a low 'Maude,' and I said, 'Yes, Mamma.' A thin white hand came towards me: 'My little Maude, I am going to leave you. I wish I had shown more love for you, Maude, but it is too late now. I felt it, but——Maude, will you love your little brother very much, and take care of him ?'

'Oh, Mamma, Mamma, I do !' I cried out, as if I must tell her how much I loved him before she went—and I felt she was going.

'Hush, hush, Maude !' whispered Aunt Gretta.

‘I think you do,’ whispered Mamma; ‘I never knew my little Maude could love so much as—’ She gasped for breath, and I turned in terror to Aunt Gretta.

In a minute or two she spoke again: ‘Kiss me, Maude;’ and as I did so, she said, in a faint voice, ‘Take care of baby-brother; I leave him to you, Maude, because you love him so much;’ and she smiled her last smile on me, and Aunt Gretta led me from the room.

I remember being told afterwards that baby had been baptised in Mamma’s bedroom, because she was so anxious to have it done before she went, and that his name was ‘Gershom.’ And when I cried to think that my baby—the baby I loved so dearly—should have such an ugly name, Aunt Gretta told me that it was Mamma’s last wish it should be so. When Papa asked her if she had any wish about his name, she raised herself suddenly up in bed, and said, ‘Call him “Gershom,” for I have been a stranger in a

strange land ;' and she did not speak again. And so we took from it the pet name of 'Gypsie' for our darling, and never called him anything else.

I thought of all this now, and it did me good. It was well to be released, if but for half-an-hour, from the fierce thraldom of an absorbing, relentless memory. It was well to face again another sorrow, and feel for a little time that I had had a mother, and that that mother had lived, loved, and died. And, thinking of her, I naturally began to think of Dr. Vanny. The two had always been connected closely in my mind, since my visit to Banton. And while I was sitting thinking, the room grew darker and darker, and I was roused by the door opening, but I could not see who entered. Some one came up to me, sat down before me, and said, after a minute's silence, 'This is Gypsie's birthday.'

It was Dr. Vanny. I made no answer, and again he said, 'Maude, do you remember that to-day is Gypsie's birthday ?'

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘Gypsie has told me so.’

‘Then you did not remember?’ he said; but, receiving no answer, he went on, ‘Do you remember seven years ago to-day, Maude?’

‘Yes,’ I said.

‘You do? Poor child!’

I was ashamed of myself. His voice was so pitying, so tender, so kind. And was he not the one to be pitied? Had he not suffered—suffered through a whole life-time, and never spoken of his pain? A pang of utter humiliation and sorrow seized me. I saw I was selfish, weak, blind, and utterly worthless. By a sudden impulse, I rose, and knelt down by his chair, but I shed no tear. I could not, I had not wept for weeks.

‘Poor child!’ he said, laying his hand fondly on my head, ‘poor child!’ and he said nothing more.

I do not know how long Dr. Vanny sat there silent. The room grew quite dark except for the light of the fire, which was very

faint. At last, he suddenly rose and spoke, and his voice was so changed that it seemed to me it could not be the same man who spoke.

‘Listen, Maude,’ he said. ‘I loved your mother; she loved me; but we could not marry, and life went hardly with us both; for we loved as—as you love. She died. I am left to fight on, and I mean to do it. You, poor child, are weak, and cannot. I thought you could, but I see that the odds are against you, and you will fall. Two lives I have seen marred, and—never mind. God forgive me this moment, if I do wrong. You have had a hard life, child; I know all about it. You may have a harder before you—God knows. But you have chosen it, and you shall have it. I loved your mother, Maude, or perhaps I should never have done this—’ and Dr. Vanny put something in my hand, broke the fire up into a blaze, left a kiss on my forehead, and went,—shutting the door sharply behind him.

The bright warm blaze filled the room ; a glow was around me and within me—for what Dr. Vanny had left in my hand was a note, and the note was in Edgar's handwriting, and when I saw it—I wept.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

THAT night I slept well and soundly, and the next day—Sunday—was the last day I passed in my room. On Monday morning I came down to breakfast.

Naturally enough, it excited surprise and remark. Papa was glad that I had conquered inclination and yielded to what was right and beneficial. Aunt Gretta was in overwhelming fear and anxiety lest I had been incautious, done wrong, or should take cold and have another illness worse than the last. Maggie immediately began planning her visit to some watering-place, interspersing her remarks with pity for herself and her misfortunes ; and Gypsie—my Gypsie—sat silent, with his hand fast locked in mine and his eyes swimming over.

I entered as eagerly as I could into Maggie's plans. My own were formed. That quiet Sunday had decided everything for me.

Dr. Vanny came to see me on that Sunday morning. He only staid five minutes, and Aunt Gretta and Maggie were in the room. He scarcely spoke or looked at me after the first growl—for I can call it nothing but a growl; he was crosser and more snappish than ever.

At dinner-time Maggie again began to talk about her visit, declaring she should die, if she did not go somewhere at once; there could be no possible reason for staying at home any longer. And I said there was not.

The next day I wrapped up warmly, and walked quickly up and down the garden for half-an-hour. Dr. Vanny met me there, but he only asked if I were well wrapped up, and left me. Does he never mean to talk to me again? I am afraid not. He must soon, or it will be too late, for I am going to Edgar!

That note was from him. He had written

to tell me where he was and what he was doing, and then he—he asked me never to think of him again, to forget him for ever !

Dr. Vanny had had this note in his possession many weeks. It had been written very soon after Edgar's letter to me, and fearing that if it came to the Hall, Papa might see it and detain it, he enclosed it in a note to Dr. Vanny, requesting that he would forward it to me. Dr. Vanny did not do so. I have had a note from him this morning. Here it is :

‘ My dear Child,

‘ As you do not need me now, I am going into the country, and shall leave matters to Mr. Thorpe.

‘ Maude, I have been in possession of your secret for some time. I surmised it before Mr. Farren left ; I was sure of it when he did leave, and I understand all about your illness. At the peril of your soul, *never meddle with the contents of a medicine-chest again.* I

know more about you than you think. I kept Mr. Farren's note back, thinking it right to do so ; but when I found things were going hardly with you—too hardly—and you would sink, I gave it you. Heaven judge me if I did wrong !

‘ I wish you had both been—married or dead—before this had happened.

‘ If I had not loved your mother, Maude, I would not have done what I have done now. She suffered ; I suffered. Child, take care you do not suffer too. God help you !

‘ E. H. S. VANNY.’

A week after that Monday morning they all started for Cheltenham except Aunt Gretta. Gypsie begged and entreated to stay at home, but I would not second his request. I do not think Gypsie is well ; he seems to me very pale and thin. And now, my mind is made up I must not falter. I will be brave. So Gypsie, my darling, my little brother, my comforter, whose love has been my hope, my

life, my heaven, I have bid you farewell ! Have I held you in love's fierce clasp, listened to that childish voice, kissed those sweet lips for the last time ? God knows. Nay—why do I take *His* name upon my lips ? He will not own me now, for I cast Him off in the time of my extremity. Well, but God will love Gypsie, for Gypsie is good. Then God bless and keep my Gypsie, for my love is of no avail now !

Wednesday, Nov. 10.

I find I have written a great deal. What else can I do ? It keeps me employed ; it makes the time pass, and I want it to pass.

Dr. Vanny has returned, and I have seen him, but no word has passed between us. Kind, good Dr. Vanny ! when you know all, judge me not harshly ; be pitiful for the sake of my dead mother ; be merciful for the remembrance of the love you bore her ; be tender when you think of her—lying in her grave !

And Aunt Louise ! will she disown me ?

Perhaps she will ; but Gypsie will not. His heart will always cling, and his little hand will ever be held out to ' Sister Maude.'

I will try and not think about this ; it makes me hesitate, and doubt, and tremble. I will not write about it. I will try and devote this week entirely to Aunt Gretta. I should like her last remembrance of ' poor Maude ' to be a pleasant one.

All my plans are fixed. True to his word, Edgar told me where he was and what he was doing—nothing more. Told me, because he must keep his word, and only for that reason. I trusted him ; he has proved true, and I will be true to him.

Aunt Gretta is exceedingly anxious that I should go with her to Cheltenham ; and as this has been openly talked about at dinner, Rawlins must have heard something of it. She is a steady, respectable woman, forty years old, and I will take her with me. I cannot go alone ; she will be the very person I need. I think she is rather fond of me. She helped

Mrs. Nilson when I was ill, and she has waited on me entirely since Mrs. Nilson left ; and as she has only been with us a short time, and I have been ill a great part of it, she knows very little of my habits. I shall simply tell her that I have to go a journey, and I should like her to go with me. I need frame no excuses— invent nothing. I will try to do right as far as I can, though I dare not now ask God to help me or take care of me.

If Aunt Gretta go with Papa on Monday —and as the baby is really unwell I think she will—I shall set off on Tuesday morning. Edgar is at Mannerton, in —shire. He has a situation there as one of the masters in the Grammar School. It is a long journey, but I have made out all about it. These are Edgar's words in his note :—‘ I must keep my word. I wish I had never given it, for, Maude, what will it avail you to know where I am or what my life is ?—the life of a man whose love is his doom ; who has, and ever will have, a “ life-long hunger ” in his heart.

My little Maude, whose love brought heaven to my heart, and for one touch of whose lips I would gladly die a thousand deaths—at the mention of whose name my manhood sends up an exceeding bitter cry—but all in vain—farewell, farewell !'

It is not in vain, Edgar, and you shall know it is not !

I know what time my train will start ; for once in my life I have made out about a train. I shall have to leave here about half-past nine. I shall not tell Rawlins until the night before. We shall arrive in Mannerton at five o'clock. Edgar will be leaving the Grammar School about that time, I should think. I have his address—13, Endane Street, Mannerton. I can make no mistake. It is all clear, and I have plenty of money—plenty for the present. When I am married, I shall have a right to my fortune on Mamma's side. This property is vested in the hands of trustees, and Dr. Vanny is one now, so that if Papa should never leave me a shilling, I shall still have

that; I think it is ten thousand pounds. Edgar knows nothing about this, except I fancy, now I come to think of it, that I once mentioned it to him at Banton. He shall find out that his wife shall be no burden to him, though she comes unasked—not unloved!

I wonder what strange, new spirit of hope, energy, resolution, has come to me? I never used to think anything about these matters. Now, I seem to be almost a business-woman. We shall not be quite poor, even should Papa —oh, Papa, Papa!

I did not mean to break off; I did not mean to break down. I must not do that now! I will not. God help me! Why do I say that—why, when I am so wicked?

I shall not write again until—until—. Perhaps just a few lines, the last night.

Monday Night, Nov. 19.

All is done. It is twelve o'clock. I am ready—quite ready. I cannot weep; I am not afraid.

For one minute to-night I look back into the Past. I see there—strivings, resolves, heart-yearnings, impulses after the right, and bitter memories of the wrong.

I look to the Present, and I am resolute, desperate—satisfied.

I look into the Future, and my hand trembles, my eyes burn—but they do not fill. No—I do not weep now! Weeping is for those who falter, who hesitate, who are afraid, who draw back. I do not.

I see two pictures. One is of a home ; of clasping hands and warm firesides ; of tender farewells and joyous meetings ; of constant faith and unfailing trust ; of life and death—together.

The other ? I see it too. It is of a woman—desolate, alone, forsaken. Home, friends, name—all gone. No hope for this world ; none for the next. Weeks, months, years passed, and then—Death. I have heard someone call it the 'Releaser.'

I have dared all this for you, Edgar ! I

dare it now, and I will dare it to the end. Pitiful Heaven ! Heaven, to which my mother has gone—Heaven, to which my Gypsie will one day go, be merciful, be merciful !

Farewell, Stonecross ! place where my mother died, and my Gypsie has lived ! Farewell garden, and fields, and hills, and flowers ! I would linger a moment amidst every association of peace ; I would banish every memory of regret ; I would dwell on that which would soften and touch this hard heart. Farewell, Gypsie's cot, where I have so often knelt and felt my darling's warm kisses. Farewell, my room, where I—no, no, I cannot ! Only one more spot, farewell ! That quiet corner in the churchyard, that modest grave, that lonely place where I first met him, first loved him, and where to-night I stood for the last time and vowed that neither Life nor Death should part me from my love !

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

Tuesday, December 21.

I TAKE up my pen and open my book. I look at my last entry. It is just five weeks since I sat in my bedroom at Stonecross and wrote the last page.

And now——? I will try and take up my life where I left it, and tell all that has befallen me since that 14th of November.

Let me think. I am strong and well now. I can write, and it will help the time to go. I have three days before me and nothing much to do, so I will employ the time in writing.

That 14th of November! it needs no effort to recall it. It was a true November

morning—foggy, blinding with a drizzling rain and a raw east wind. I think I must have slept very soundly during the night, for it was six o'clock when I awoke, and I awoke from a dream. A sweet face looked on me, kind eyes shone down upon me through a mist of tears, quivering lips moved speechless as if to bless me, a hand was stretched out to me, but as I turned to grasp it, it faded! I knew who had come to me in a vision of the night, and from my inmost soul I cried out to my Mother to guard me from evil. To God, I dared not pray.

I put on a new dress. Was I not putting away old things? I had packed my trunk the night before; my travelling things were all ready. I locked and directed my trunk, and then sat down to do all that remained to be done—writing to Papa and Aunt Gretta.

I soon did this—I marvel now, when I look back, and see how quickly and quietly I did my work—with no hesitation, no fear. I

told them the exact truth. I said that I still loved Mr. Farren, and that, as I had made up my mind to be his wife, I had no alternative but to do what I was doing and go to him ; and that no human being—he, least of all—had any idea of my intention. I did it entirely on my own responsibility. I had taken Rawlins with me, and when I was Mr. Farren's wife I would write to them, and Rawlins should return, or, if they would not receive her, I would provide her a home. I asked Papa to forgive me ; I felt it was quite useless, yet I asked forgiveness and pity for his child.

I sealed and directed both letters ; carefully secured them about me, and then quietly went down to breakfast. I tried to eat, but I could not ; nature would have her way, and I turned from the table. I did not ring for the things to be taken away ; cold and still, I sat down on a low chair by the fire, and waited. I remember Rawlins coming to the door, and when I told her to come in, I

saw her look of wonder, as she glanced at the untouched table and then at me.

‘Miss Maude,’ she said, in a very grave, respectful tone, ‘had you not better put your visit off? You look very white this morning, and it is not fit for you to travel; there is a drizzling rain falling, and it is cold and misty.’

‘No,’ I said, and I think I spoke calmly and firmly; ‘I must do what I have arranged to do; but, Rawlins, I will take one of the other servants if you would rather not go with me.’

‘Oh no! Miss Maude,’ she said, ‘I did not mean that. Of course, I will go with you, if you wish it. Elizabeth will do quite well without me, now there is so little work to be done; but I thought you looked so ill, and you have not touched your breakfast. I am afraid, Miss Maude, that Dr. Vanny would not think you fit for a journey, and I am sure your Aunt would not. Would it not be better to put your visit off until she returns, as she will be back on Friday?’

For reply, I turned steadily round, faced her, and said, 'I *must* go, Rawlins; let me know when the carriage is at the door,' and without another word, she left the room.

In twenty minutes more, the carriage was round. Old Watson was always punctual, but I could not help hearing him grumble as I stood a moment on the threshold. 'Such a morning as this for the 'orses to be hout; let alone Miss Maude, who 'ad 'ad such a 'ard pull of it, and who looked as if she 'ad ought to a-been a-bed!'

My trunk was in; Rawlins was waiting, and yet I lingered. A thick veil of mist hung over garden, shrubbery, lawn, and distant hills; a leaden sky wept a blinding rain; the sough of a November wind swept through the leafless boughs, and thick showers of decaying leaves were whirled about in eddying gusts. And, almost until that very day, all had been a bright and mild autumnal decay! Everything was changed that morning. One long, last look, and I drew down

my thick veil and stepped into the carriage, and Watson drove slowly away.

Very slowly it seemed to me. Not a word passed between Rawlins and myself. I remember nothing on the way ; I think I saw nothing. I only *felt*, and felt that I had left my home for ever.

When we stopped at the station, my head swam and my limbs trembled ; but when Rawlins said, as she helped me out, 'Miss Maude, I am sure you are ill ; do let us go back, even now,' her words recalled me to myself. I watched the porter take the luggage, and then desired Watson to return. The old man demurred :—'Adn't I better wait a bit, Miss Maude, and see yer off ? 'appen yer may want something ?'

'No, I want nothing, and I wish you to return now. Good-bye, Watson.' He looked astonished, but he said no more, and with a respectful, 'Good morning, Miss Maude, and a pleasant journey,' he left, and I could not have returned, had I wished.

I did not wish. Restless, with a mountain-load on my heart and a hand of fire on my head, I had but one intense resolve, one consuming desire, one determined object before me, and I could not turn back from it.

I took the tickets. I told Rawlins to go into the waiting-room until I came to her, and then I walked up and down the station, straining my eyes and ears for the tardy train. Up and down! What minutes those were—hours and days in their flight! Up and down! though the November wind wailed through the small station and the rain fell fast and heavy overhead. I saw the porters look wonderingly at me, and I noticed the station-master come and stand outside with his hands in his pockets, and whistle, apparently with no particular purpose.

I saw this. I was keenly alive through all my restlessness to any notice. I did not care. It made me desperate—defiant; and I smiled a bitter smile under my veil.

At last the dull roll of the train! It came

shrieking into the station, like a doomed thing. I went for Rawlins. A porter opened a carriage-door ; we were in ; the door was shut ; a moment's delay ; a little noise and confusion and hurrying ; the station-master's voice shouting some commands, the men running to obey, and—the train moved. It was off. A little faster—we were out of the station ; faster still ; a minute or two more it was at full speed ; and we were on our way to Mannerton.

I pray the God of Heaven—the God in whom Edgar believes—that I may never feel again what I felt at that moment !

I leant back among the cushions ; there were only ourselves in the carriage, and Rawlins did not speak. I do not know how the time went or what places we passed. I knew we were going on, that was all—on to Edgar.

But what—what if, even loving me as he did, as I knew he did, what if he should condemn me ; what, if in his extreme notions

of what was right, he should say I had made a great mistake ? What if he should shrink from having for his wife one who, however he had once loved, had sunk in his esteem ; what if, worse than all, he married me out of pity for my weakness, and lived to reproach me with what I had done ? What if—and my blood curdled at the thought—what if he were gone ! Gone from that large busy town to which I had never been, but of which I had often heard—gone, and left no trace ? What if he were dead ? I sat quite upright, and gazed through my veil into the gloom outside. This last possibility occurring to my imagination was not so terrible as the former. Better, far better that he were dead, and that I might have for ever the blessed memory of his love, than that I should live to see him look coldly upon me. ‘ Anything but this ! anything ! ’ my soul instinctively cried out to its Maker, and then recoiled again, as I felt I had no right thus to appeal.

And if he should be dead ! Then, I

would rejoice that I had ever known him. I would cherish every look, every word, every tone of his—cherish them through every hour of my existence. I would work, and when the time came, I would die. Nay, if Edgar had gone to Heaven, I would try and go there too, so that one day I might see him again, and perhaps in that world, in the existence of which he devoutly believed, I should feel the touch of his hand and see the infinite love beam forth from his eyes.

I remember hearing Rawlins' voice once or twice, but I took no notice, it did not occur to me that I need answer her, until a much louder tone, and a strange expression in it, caused me to turn round. I saw she looked troubled and frightened.

‘Miss Maude, excuse me,’ she said; ‘but I was afraid you were ill, as I had spoken three times.’

‘I am not ill,’ I said. ‘Do you want anything, Rawlins?’

‘Only—I hope you will excuse me, Miss

Maude—but having been so little time in the family, and you having been so ill, I hope you will not think it impertinent of me, asking if you are going a long journey, and if you are going to a friend's.'

I made up my mind in an instant. I saw Rawlins' fears were aroused by my strange behaviour. It was not right to take her without having some notion, however vague, of the matter. I put up my veil, and looked steadily at her.

'Rawlins,' I said, 'it is quite right of you to ask me, as I am taking you with me. I am going a long journey to Mannerton, in —shire. I am going to a friend who used to live in Stonecross, before you came to us. I am not perfectly sure of finding this friend at once, and I wish you to stay a day or two with me. As soon as I can do without you, you shall return home; and now, I should like to be left quiet, as I cannot talk.'

Rawlins acquiesced at once, and I was left quiet—quite quiet. We had to change

our train twice. I gave Rawlins money, and instructed her to get the carriage to ourselves. The hours passed, and I perceived by the lessening light that the afternoon was wearing on. Rawlins had never interrupted my thoughts, except by entreating me with tears in her eyes to eat something at the different places where we stopped. I could not, but I forced myself to swallow a glass of wine at the last changing place, and then we started on the last stage of our journey—a little time and we should be in Mannerton ! I was conscious of but one sensation—a determined, resolute desperation, a kind of stupor of mind, which made me dead to every thought, every feeling, every idea, but—should I find him, and how ?

It grew darker. Everything outside was a confused, blurred picture ; the rain mingled all in one grey mist ; and then the evening came on. And still time passed, and I took no notice of the passing until the train stopped. Our tickets were collected, and I knew

before Rawlins told me, that we were in Mannerton.

I have no remembrance of the next five minutes. I remember standing on the platform—standing icy cold and perfectly still amidst the confusion and noise around me. Rawlins took a firm hold of my arm, and I turned to listen.

‘Miss Maude, where does your friend live, and what are you going to do?’

Was I to give way now at the very moment I wanted to be strong? I rallied my powers, and said, ‘I am not going there at once, Rawlins; call a carriage, and tell the man to drive to the best hotel in Mannerton.’

Rawlins did as I told her, and in five minutes more we were in the streets of Mannerton. I do not know how long afterwards it was when the carriage stopped. Rawlins got out, and I heard the driver say, ‘The Royal, ma’am—the Royal; best hotel in all Mannerton; all the first-classers stay here; his

Grace the Duke of —— was here only a fortnight gone, ma'am.'

'Very likely,' said Rawlins, in a tone which expressed no gratification at such information.

She saw the boxes taken off, paid the driver, and then helped me out. I cast a glance up at the building before which I found myself standing. It was very large, very high, and seemed to have innumerable windows, now brilliantly lighted. A flight of massive stone steps led up from where I was standing to inner folding-doors, through whose frosted glass a glare of subdued light fell on the pavement. The lintels of the inner door were of massive and carved mahogany, and the stone cornices and rests on each side of the outer flight were fretted and chiseled into strange forms and devices. The driver, who was profuse in his attentions to Rawlins, pulled the bell with an energy which made the peal reverberate through the building, and made me shiver from head to foot.

'That's quite enough,' said Rawlins, testily; 'and now you can go.'

'I'm No. 35, Miss,' he said, touching his hat to me, 'off Kedruff's stand, found at the — station; 'ope to serve you again, Miss, when you want a car.'

'Now, Miss Maude,' said Rawlins, quickly, and I walked steadily up the flight of steps, above which now stood an immense footman.

I had never been in an hotel alone in my life before. I did not know what I was to do or say. Our boxes were in the hall in an instant. Desperation forced me to speak — 'We require a private sitting-room and two bedrooms. The rooms must be together and as quiet and secluded as possible. Show me to them, please, and let us have tea.'

'Certainly, Miss; this way if you please;' and some one appearing at the moment, whom I took for a lady, but who turned out to be a waiting-maid, the footman told her what we required, and left us in her charge.

I remember she had black sparkling eyes,

which seemed to find their way through my veil and read my face.

‘ This way, Miss, if you please ; a very bad night for travelling, Miss ;’ and, relieving Rawlins of my cloak, she flitted up a wide shallow staircase, turning round every now and then to say, ‘ This way, if you please, Miss.’

I followed, steadying myself as I went up by the bosses and carvings of the mahogany balustrade, and at length she threw open the door of a room, saying, ‘ Will this be what you like, Miss ?’

I saw nothing, though a large chandelier in the centre seemed blazing with light.

‘ It will do,’ I said ; ‘ and now, where are the bedrooms ? I should like my maid to have a room opening into mine.’

‘ Certainly, Miss ;’ and again I followed her, until she threw open the door of another apartment and of another which led from it.

‘ These will do,’ I said, without even a glance round the rooms.

‘Miss Maude,’ said Rawlins, when the girl had left us, after a prolonged and keen glance, while she asked some questions about what we required, ‘had you not better go into the sitting-room and lie down until your bedroom fire is lighted, and I get the room warm and comfortable for you?’

I submitted. I had begun to feel that I should inevitably break down before my task was accomplished, did I not rest a little. When Rawlins took me into the sitting-room, I saw that a bright fire blazed on the hearth, and a couch was drawn up before it. Rawlins took authority upon her. She led me to the sofa, and put me upon it; she took off my walking things and my boots, arranged the cushions, and laid me down on them. She covered me with something warm, turned the gas quite low, and then left me, and all this without a word.

The blinds were not drawn down, and I lay with dry, aching eyes, and hot hands clenched into one, looking out into the night.

I heard a church clock strike six; then another and another; then a deep-toned bell rang out its prolonged note; it was answered by another and another, and soon I heard the confused tramp of hundreds of feet and the loud laugh and jest of work-people. It was the hour of release from the cotton factories, and in the wet November night the mechanics and cotton-weavers strode heavily through the mud. Tramp, tramp, tramp—plash, splash, splash. I heard it all now. I was not stupid; my nerves were strung to their furthest tension, and every sound jarred and quivered through me. Far away, my eyes could strain through the darkness. I saw a huge building, whose lighted windows seemed to spread over earth and reach to heaven. I watched, with eyes that pierced the gloom, and I saw the lights disappear—one row, another, and another, till all had gone, and it was darkness. Then I turned to another building lighted up, and in the same manner its lights melted away, and it

was a thing of night. Then the door opened, and Rawlins came in.

‘Your room is comfortable now, Miss Maude; and if you will come and let me help you to dress, and then have some tea, you will feel refreshed.’

I said, ‘Thank you;’ and then Rawlins took me into my room, and dressed me like a child, all the time making no remark and asking no question; and when she had finished, she put me into an arm-chair by the fire, and asked me if I would try and take some tea, if she brought it me there. I said I would, and when she had arranged a tempting tea beside me, she left me again, saying she would get her own tea and come to me again.

I drank my tea and ate as much as I could, and then I sat back in my chair, and tried to steady my head by pressing my hand tightly over it until Rawlins came back to me. When she came in, I sat upright and looked at her.

‘I am a great deal better, Rawlins. I thank you very much for your care of me. And now, I want you to get me a carriage, and go with me where I have to go.’

Rawlins stood aghast at my proposal.

‘I must go, Rawlins.’

‘Miss Maude,’ she said, ‘you *cannot*; you are fit for nothing but to go to bed; you will kill yourself if you go out again to-night.’

‘I must go, Rawlins,’ I repeated, and Rawlins went away; and in the moment I was left alone, I did what I had not done for very long. I knelt down by the arm-chair, and tried to pray to God.

When Rawlins returned, I put on my own things, with an energy which seemed to astonish her, and we were both ready before the servant announced that the car had come.

Without a moment’s hesitation, I left the room, and never once pausing, I went along the corridor, down the staircase, across the

long and lofty hall, at a pace which Rawlins had to run to keep up with, and I was in the car before she could speak.

‘ Whoo’re to ?’ said the driver, rather gruffly. He was not No. 35.

‘ 13 Endane Street.’ My voice did not falter in the least.

‘ Endane Street,’ repeated the man ; ‘ if tha’ be’ant three mile, it be’ant a yard ; and mugging like it da’ t’neet.’

‘ Shut the door,’ I said, ‘ and put us down at the beginning of Endane Street,’ and I was obeyed.

‘ Three miles !’ It was a hundred. But I neither spoke nor moved, and Rawlins did not speak to me.

• The car stopped, the door was opened, the steps let down ; Rawlins stepped out, I followed, and we stood in Endane Street.

‘ Pay him, Rawlins,’ I said, and she mutely obeyed.

‘ Can you show me where No. 13 is ?’ I asked.

'It be'nt no use tryin' to shoo now't wi' such a drizzle in your ee,' responded the man; 'ye're nobbut to dow but yowsk t'ye find yer.'

Rawlins and I walked on. I did not feel the cold; I did not feel the rain; I did not feel that the wind was wildly shaking my dress, my veil, my cloak. I did not feel the darkness; I did not feel that I was walking with a comparative stranger in a strange town at an hour when I was never accustomed to be out. I did not think of Cheltenham or of Stonecross. I did not think of Papa or Aunt Gretta or of Maggie, probably on her way then to some festive scene. I did not think of Gypsie, perhaps then prattling about 'Sister Maude.' Only one thought was in my heart, one word in my ears, one sight before my eyes!

I stopped before the first window from which a light shone, stopped only for a second, then felt in the dark for the door, and without an instant's pause knocked.

There was a sound inside, and the door opened.

‘Is this No. 13?’ I asked.

‘Noo, it be’ant. Weer’s t’use of t’noomber bein on t’doore if folk woon’t tak trouble t’looke?’

‘Let me, Miss Maude,’ suddenly exclaimed Rawlins, stepping before me, and bringing her tall figure in full view of the woman, who rather drew back at the unexpected sight. ‘Which is No. 13?’ she asked, in a tone which compelled an answer.

‘Tew doores ’igher oop,’ said the woman, civilly, and we went.

Two doors! Only two doors! Five minutes more and I should know what was before me—whether—. I was only twenty-one, and I had suffered much, and was not strong.

Rawlins knocked. The knock rang through the stillness, the echo died away. There was a sound of scuffling footsteps inside, a loud voice said something, and the

door was flung open. I spoke. 'Does Mr. Farren live here ?'

It seemed to me for an instant that the wind and rain hushed, and the Earth stood still, and the Heavens bent down to listen.

'Yees, he doo ; whoot o' thart ?'

'I want to see him.'

'Ye doo ! woll, I doan't s'pose y'ere can, then ; ye bean't a mon wha' leekes t' see folk t'neeght.'

'Will you show me to his room, and say that a lady wishes to see him ? I will leave my maid in the passage until I return. Rawlins, step inside.'

Rawlins obeyed, and it had the desired effect. The woman stared at her, then at me, pushed past us to shut the door, and then with some muttered words, walked up the narrow passage.

'Thees way, Miss, if yer plees. It be a bad neeght for a lady to be oot. Mr. Farren a' tew roomes on t' foorst floore, and yer be'ant a bad lodger, yer be'ant.'

Up a narrow, dark flight of stairs I stumbled. We were at the top ; she knocked, and without waiting for a reply, threw open the door.

‘ Ye’re be a ludy wants yer, sir ; bleese me, yer bean’t theere ; ye be a wooshing ’is ’arnds ’arter soome o’ them narsty speeriments ; sit yer doone and I’ll tell yim.’

She half closed the door, and left me. In wild restlessness, I took off my hat and veil, laid them on the table, and then turned to look round me.

I see that room now, exactly as I saw it then. Let me describe it.

A small apartment, low, and with a greasy paper on the walls ; the hearth unswept ; the carpet threadbare, and the covers of the horsehair chairs showed large holes ; a straight-backed sofa stood against the wall, and on it was a pile of books, untidy and disarranged ; a torn and discoloured oilcloth partly covered a table, on which stood a tea-tray, pushed into one corner. Upon the tea-

tray was an empty cup and saucer, a common white plate, with the remains of a bread-loaf on it, and a black-handled knife by it. The tea-pot was of pewter, uncleaned and dull ; a scrap of dirty-looking butter on a small blue plate, with a basin to match the plate, and a cream-jug of different pattern, completed the service. By the side of these things stood a chemical apparatus, and brought down to it by a gutta-percha tube, a jet of gas was flaring. Glass tubes and bottles lay by it, and a yellowish mixture in a vessel near emitted—not the sweetest perfume. At the other end of the table was an open blotting-book, on which a finished letter seemed left to dry, and close by, a quill pen was stuck in a penny bottle of ink. There were three dirty wood-cuts hung on the walls of the room ; one was of a Methodist chapel ; another of a cotton factory ; and the third of a fat giant. The fire was low and choked with ashes. There was not a sign—not the faintest indication or suggestion of comfort or home.

And this was Edgar's room ! As I stood there, holding myself up by the painted mantel-shelf, I noticed everything with that keen power which always comes to me in great crises of mental suffering, and which is a sure precursor of a collapse. More rapidly than I can think of it, I had seen all—from the dirty ceiling, and the cobwebs in the corner, to the rusty fire-irons and threadbare carpet.

I could have been in the room only two minutes, when I heard a step. It came nearer, and with overpowering instinct, I turned from facing the door, and stood with my back to it. One second more, and Edgar was in the room.

I did not move or speak ; hand and foot were chained until I felt that he was quite near me ; and with one last effort, I turned suddenly round and faced him. He recoiled involuntarily, as if a spirit had sprung from the dead and appeared before him, and then he stood speechless. Not a sound was in the room, until one word fell from Edgar's lips—

it seemed forced from him against his own will and convictions—‘ Maude ! ’

‘ Yes,’ I said, ‘ I am Maude. I have come to you, Edgar. If you still love me, I will be your wife ; if you do not I will go away, and you shall never see me again.’

Without a movement, without a change of attitude or expression, again Edgar said nothing but ‘ Maude ! ’

‘ I am Maude,’ I repeated, ‘ though you do not believe it. Speak to me, Edgar ; ’ and that was all I said. I was succumbing now. The room swam round ; the lights multiplied a hundredfold ; everything danced before my eyes ; the walls closed in upon me, the ceiling touched me—pressed me—crushed me ; and with the last act of volition of which I was capable—with the instinctive human cry for help in direst need—I stretched out both my hands to Edgar.

I did not fall, for he caught me. I lost all power, but I did not lose consciousness for the moment, for I remember all that passed.

It seemed to me that the brain, too highly wrought, refused to sink into passivity, while the body lost all strength, and could not put forth another effort.

Edgar took me into his arms, and I was safe there. Edgar's passionate kisses were on lips, cheek, and forehead, and new life came to me with them. Edgar's hand put back the hair from my hot face, and was laid—cool and steady—on my burning forehead, and it was a touch of healing. I was quite safe ; it was all over now ; and as I felt this, I lost consciousness, for when I opened my eyes I was lying on a couch, with Rawlins bathing my face and hands ; but I was safe—quite safe.

I felt it—felt it in the tight clasp of my hand and the unspeakable love which looked down on me from the eyes whose glance I knew so well.

Only that, and nothing more. I might have been an utter stranger from the way in which he spoke to Rawlins.

‘Miss Maynard is a little better now, I think.’

‘Yes sir,’ said Rawlins, ‘I hope she is. She was not fit to come out so far after her illness.’

‘Her illness!’ but he caught up his words. ‘Yes, it was a long journey. And now, if you think she is fit to go, I will call your car.’

‘Miss Maude sent it back,’ said Rawlins; ‘it only came to the top of the street.’

‘I will get one,’ he said, and he left the room.

‘Miss Maude, dear!’ said Rawlins.

I tried to speak, but in vain. It seemed to me that all I could do was to bear, and only just bear, the awful pain in my head.

I suppose Rawlins sat and looked at me, and then I heard Edgar’s foot on the stairs.

‘Miss Maynard’s car is ready,’ he said, ‘if you think she is able to go.’

I rose to my feet and stood with the help of Rawlins’ hand.

‘ I am quite able,’ I said.

Rawlins tied my hat and veil on, and with her help I followed Edgar down stairs. We saw no one.

‘ Where shall I tell the man to drive to ? ’ he asked of Rawlins, and Rawlins told him.

He came back, and stood an instant at the open door, and spoke to Rawlins.

‘ I hope,’ he said, ‘ that with your care Miss Maynard will be better to-morrow. I will call in the morning. Good night.’

The touch of his hand ! I can feel it now.

Rawlins’ only comment as the car rolled away was, ‘ What a nice gentleman he seems ! And now, Miss Maude, I hope you will rest.’

We reached the hotel. I remember Rawlins’ care of me. I remember hearing clocks strike far and near. I remember a confused noise of rolling wheels. I remember the dull, heavy pain in my head, which, whenever I moved, changed into the blinding stab of a knife through my temples. I remember the wild longing for sleep—sleep, if only for

one hour—and asking Rawlins again and again to give me something to make me sleep. I remember she left me for a time, and when she came back, I slept heavily. She told me afterwards that I slept for six hours after the sleeping-draught she gave me.

It was quite light when I awoke. A bright fire burned in the grate, and Rawlins was sitting beside me. I tried to recollect where I was.

‘ You are better this morning, Miss Maude,’ Rawlins said, in a voice which belied her words.

Was I? In a little time I began to remember, but my head was confused and heavy, and every movement was pain.

‘ You must not try to get up,’ Rawlins said. ‘ If the gentleman calls about business,’ she went on, as she saw me trying to think, ‘ perhaps I could give him a message, or he would call again.’

‘ Yes,’ I said, ‘ Rawlins, I will get up now, and you must help me to dress, and then—’

‘ Miss Maude——’ she began.

‘ I shall get up at once, Rawlins. I must. Do not talk to me ; I am better ; help me a little, and then leave me and I shall be all right ;’ and Rawlins did as she was told, only once beginning a remonstrance, which I peremptorily silenced.

I was better ; I must be better—and with the determined resolve the power came for a time. I sent Rawlins away, and dressed my own hair. I brushed it out perfectly smooth, as smooth as the wavy ripples would come, and then coiled it round and round as I knew Edgar liked to see it. I had never taken such pains with my hair as I did on that morning, for I knew that it was my wedding day. I put on a dress I had never worn before—a soft, warm, bright winter’s dress—one Aunt Gretta had ordered for me when I was getting better. I put on no ornaments—I did not need them now. I was going to be the wife of a poor man.

When Rawlins came in I was dressed.

‘Good gracious, Miss Maude!’ she exclaimed, and she said no more, but stood and looked at me, only ejaculating, when she had finished her inspection, ‘I never did in all my life!’

‘You see, I am better, Rawlins,’ I said; ‘and if you will get me some breakfast, I will eat it.’

‘Breakfast is ready,’ was all Rawlins answered, and I went into the room and ate it. Then I put on my hat and jacket—both new, but all in keeping with my dress, and just the every-day suit I should have worn at home. I put all on, even to my gloves, and then I was ready. Rawlins found me so when she came in.

I believe the only way in which she could account for that morning’s transactions was, by believing that I was possessed; and in looking back, I am inclined to think too that I was—at least for the time. She made no comment; she rang for the breakfast-things to be removed, and then, taking her work,

she said she would sit in the adjoining room, and she should be close at hand when I wanted her.

I did not want her. Another would take care of me now—another whose right it should be, and for whom I waited. I had not long to wait. The time-piece had just chimed half-past ten, when I heard a foot on the stairs. I had heard many that morning, but this one was different from all others. A knock at the door was followed by the announcement,—‘A gentleman, Miss, wishes to see you,’ and I was alone with Edgar. All he said was, ‘Are you ready, Maude?’ and I said, ‘Yes,’ and we went out together.

I remember that walk through the streets of Mannerton. It was a fine day; a strong wind had swept the remembrance of yesterday’s rain away; it was mild for November. Even through the smoke of that busy city, and above the towering height of its cotton-factories, and over the grimy front of its warehouses and the tall stacks of its countless

chimneys, a few mild sunbeams floated lazily down, and wished Edgar and me a golden 'Good morning.' Even among the multitude of its busy men, hurrying to and fro with hasty step, intent on buying and getting gain, there were few who did not unconsciously pause in their walk, to give us a glance of more than common interest.

And so we quietly walked through those crowded streets, with all the noise and hurry of intense commercial life around us: we two—to whom had come that fearful gift of love, as what?—a doom or a benison, a curse or a blessing, a Heaven or a Hell? We two—who eighteen months before had never seen each other, and who now —

It always seemed to me that in little matters—in silent, unnoticed, *felt* things—it always appeared to me that Edgar seemed exactly to know what I wanted, without a word being spoken to tell him. I never thanked him in my heart for anything, I think, so much as for the thoughtfulness

which made him never speak one word to me during that walk. I think one word would have been too much. Perhaps Edgar saw this, and so we went silently on through those bustling streets—Edgar and I on our wedding-day.

At length we stopped—only an instant's pause, and it was before some large iron gates, and in another moment we were walking up a churchyard path, amongst the quiet dead ; amongst those who had once lived and loved as Edgar and I now did—no, not quite.

I remember standing a moment before great barred iron doors, and Edgar spoke to me then.

I cannot remember very distinctly after that. I lifted my eyes for one moment to the face of the clergyman, who stood, surplice on and book in hand, at the altar, and I thought that he looked down upon me with tenderness, and—perhaps pity. I remember Edgar's voice, so ringing and clear, and the clasp of his hand, which seemed as if it must

and would put strength and courage into my own. I remember hearing the words, 'till death us do part,' and I remember being in the vestry, and he called me his 'wife,' 'until death, Maude—until death !' Nothing but that can part us now !' I felt in my heart that it was so, and I was glad.

I have a very indistinct notion of anything else. I think the clergyman seemed to know Edgar very well, for after he had shaken hands kindly with me, and said he wished me much happiness, he put me gently into a large, old oaken chair, and then, turning to Edgar, stood talking to him for some time —talking in a serious, low tone. Another gentleman, whom I had *felt* was by me in the church, had come into the vestry for a moment, shaken hands with me, and said something to Edgar, in a bantering quizzical kind of way. The only words which I heard were, 'my lad,' and then he said he must be off, as he had Edgar's work to do as well as his own, and he disappeared.

I was very glad when the clergyman had finished talking to Edgar, and my husband turned to me and said we would go. When we arrived at the hotel I could scarcely walk up the steps. Edgar put me on the couch in our sitting-room, and said he would go to Rawlins and make all arrangements. I gave him the letters which I had written to Papa and Aunt Gretta, and when he had left me I clasped my hands tightly over my forehead, and tried to be still. Rawlins came in presently, but I think Edgar must have told her not to speak to me. I saw she was packing my things, and when all was done Edgar came back to me, and told me he had finished every arrangement, had posted my letters, and also had written himself to Papa. Then I bid 'Good-bye' to Rawlins, and we came away.

We came into the country—just where I wanted to be, far away from the noise of that great town—into the peaceful, quiet country, where we were quite unknown.

And there we spent a whole week before Edgar was obliged to go back to the School.

And when I think of that week, again and again there comes unbidden to my lips the refrain of the old Scotch ballad, 'O Douglas, Douglas, so tender and true !' Yes, you were tender and true to me, my husband ! So mindful of my weakness, so careful of my comfort, so thoughtful of my least unspoken want, so prodigal of your tenderness, so utterly forgetful of self ! I wonder if any wife was so entirely happy as I was during that short week !

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